

Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary

STRATEGIES AND BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES TO KEEP CHURCH PLANTS FROM
CLOSING ITS DOORS WITHIN THE FIRST THREE YEARS

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Damian Billups

Lynchburg, Virginia

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Dr. Philip R. McFarland
Mentor

Dr. David Wheeler
Reader

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ABSTRACT

STRATEGIES AND BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES TO KEEP CHURCH PLANTS FROM CLOSING ITS DOORS WITHIN THE FIRST THREE YEARS

Damian Billups

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Mentor:

Christians are commissioned to disciple the nations. Many attempts to fulfill this commission encounter variables that hinder the fulfillment of this dictum. Statistics indicate significant proportions of church planting endeavors are challenged to survive beyond one year. This project will expose reasons church planting efforts struggle to thrive and will provide strategies and biblical principles to remedy the identified obstacles. The data will be utilized for current and future church planting efforts. The goal of this project is to reduce factors that cause church plants to close prematurely. Church laity and clergy will be surveyed for their perspectives regarding church planting vitality. Practical strategies for church growth will be researched, employed, and evaluated. Biblical principles and perspective will be examined. This project will provide a survey of strategies and biblical principles to help churches survive beyond the first three years in church planting.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Jesus' command in Matthew 28 instructs Christian believers to reach the nations. Response to that dictate produces ambition to fulfill the Great Commission and expand the kingdom of God around the globe. Since the first century and the formation of the original Christian church, efforts to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ abound. A primary means of impacting the nations with the gospel of Christ and expanding the kingdom of God is achieved by church planting endeavors. Thousands of churches are planted annually around the world, but dismal statistics indicate that a significant proportion of all church planting efforts fail to yield the harvest desired. Church planting efforts are often plagued by minimal attendance and an evident lack of interest from the community the church was planted to serve. This results in limited community impact and influence.

Both established churches and church plants toil to prosper and grow. According to Krejcir (2007), more than 4,000 churches close every year and 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity.¹ Based on a recent Gallup poll, Crary (2019) reports the percentage of American adults who are affiliated with a church or other religious organization has plummeted 20 percent over the past two decades.² Jones (2019) states plainly these trends are more than numbers; the reality is thousands of U.S churches close each year.³ According to Kwon (2010), growing churches only comprise 20 percent of all American churches and the remaining 80 percent have

¹ Richard J. Krejcir. "Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline." Churchleadership.org Entry posted 2007 <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42346>.

² David Crary. "Poll: Church Membership in U.S Plummetts Over Past 20 Years." AP News. Entry posted April, 18, 2019 <https://apnews.com/f15241378057486ea437cad490a2ed67>

³ Jeffrey M. Jones. "U.S Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades." Entry posted April 18, 2019 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>

plateaued in attendance or are shrinking in membership.⁴ Unfortunately, the majority of U.S churches have capped in attendance. Numerous churches are dwindling in membership and various circumstances force churches to permanently close their doors. Regarding church plants, many will not survive beyond a one-year time period. Church planters may experience a great waste of time and resources and may be left with feelings of discouragement, defeat, doubt, and mission failure.

The reality of church planting sustainability can be bleak. Challenges to maintain viable ministry with longevity exist. Personal involvement in a total of six church planting efforts over the previous ten years affirms the woes of church planting ministry mishap. Beginning in October 2009, a personal church plant attempt in the city of Rialto, California concluded after a duration of only two years. In the month of April of 2012, a church plant was launched in the city of Douglasville, Georgia but closed after seven months of ministry. In April of 2013, a church plant was launched in the city of Atlanta, Georgia and failed within a year. This process was repeated in 2014, 2015, and 2018 as each church experienced the same challenges and ended in similar fate. All of the aforementioned church plants experienced membership fluctuation that was characterized by inconsistency. Membership as reflected in the official record books was never able to exceed seven adults. Low attendance numbers exacerbated problems and seemed to discourage others from potentially joining the ministry. In all instances, membership eventually declined to zero and all resources were completely depleted. Generating interest from the local public was difficult and as such, it was extremely demanding to get people to attend.

⁴ Lillian Kwon. "Total Christian Churches No Longer in Decline Researchers Say." Christian Post, Entry posted May 13, 2010 <https://www.christianpost.com/news/total-us-churches-no-longer-in-decline-researchers-say.html>

According to Emetuche (2014), North America is now one of the fastest growing mission fields around the globe.⁵ Krejcir (2007) states the United States as a nation has one of the largest number of people who are not professing Christians and is becoming an ever increasing “un-reached people group.”⁶ Despite previous challenges on the mission field, the necessity to fulfill the Great Commission and make disciples of all nations remains. Embarking on another church planting mission in the city of Tampa, Florida fuels the passion of this project. Kschull (2018) recommends that the church changes its methods and strategies to better meet the needs of the population that is to be reached.⁷ It is necessary to identify previous mistakes, implement proven research-based strategies, and apply the Word of God. Addressing these areas of concern should lead to better results.

Church planting is essential to fulfilling the commission to reach the world as commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, many efforts to reach the nations fail as many church plants close prematurely. Statistics reflect this fact and show that a significant proportion of church plants do not survive beyond one year. This project seeks to expose variables that contribute to church planting success and to identify and reduce failure factors in church planting. The purpose of this project is to produce a proven methodology that guarantees success and serve as an encouragement manual for evangelist, church planters, and church leaders. The goal is to provide a survey of strategies and biblical principles to help churches survive beyond the first three years in church planting.

⁵ Damian O. Emetuche. *The Future of Church Planting in North America*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 32.

⁶ Krejcir. “Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline.” Churchleadership.org Entry posted 2007 <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42346>.

⁷ Kschull. “Hope For Dying Churches.” Facts & Trends. Entry posted January 16, 2018. <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/16/hope-for-dying-churches/>

Statement of the Problem

This study will focus on four problematic areas. Problem one is mistakes diminish the probability of long-term longevity for a planted ministry. Problem two is pragmatic strategies that are proven to produce results and improve the probability of survival for a church plant are not always employed. Problem three is the influence of the Bible is minimized and is not always the primary basis that guides the activities and efforts of ministry. Problem four is statistics have the power to sway perception but only tells a limited story.

A salient problem exists within the Christian's mission that cannot be ignored. Society is evolving and according to Kshull (2018), the church is perceived by many as irrelevant and as such, church attendance is no longer a societal norm.⁸ The influence of the Christian church has diminished and interest in the church has significantly waned. Current research demonstrates gradual decline in both the percentage of Americans who attend church or have any affiliations with religious institutions. Growing churches are rare, and statistics show that only a fraction of churches are actually growing as most churches have peaked in attendance or are on the decline. Cultural norms are shifting. Studies prove that a significant percentage of church plants fail. One in three church plants will not survive. The perception of the church is viewed negatively and God as a valued entity is less esteemed now than in generations past. These dire facts accentuate the dilemma facing the church to stay relevant and impact a world influenced by a free-spirited secular society that devalues God and celebrates anti-christ counterculture norms.

According to Donovan (2002), just over half of the American population has ties to religious organizations, but a similar number of Americans have no church home. A more

⁸ Kshull. "Hope For Dying Churches." Facts & Trends. Entry posted January 16, 2018. <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/16/hope-for-dying-churches/>

critical observation of statistics provides more in-depth understanding.⁹ Church researchers typically subsume people into three distinct categories. Researchers classify individuals as being churched, dechurched, or unchurched. Barna Group defines “churched” individuals as persons who attend church with some regularity.¹⁰ Barna considers “Dechurched” as people who once attended church service frequently and “Unchurched” people are those who have never been affiliated with a faith-based community.¹¹ Based on these definitions, Barna states 55% of the adult American populous are considered “churched,” while 45% of the adult American population qualify as “unchurched.”¹² According to Jones (2019), half of all Americans are currently church members, but this is down from 70% in the year of 1999.¹³ Bradley (2017) likewise suggest 55% of Americans have church membership but states this figure reflects a 15% drop from 70% since the year 1992.¹⁴ Further compounding the problem is the more recent drastic drop in church membership. In previous decades, “churched” individuals consistently represented around 70% of the population. The past two decades demonstrate a turn for the worse. According to Bradley (2017), 68% of the population identified as Protestant, with a

⁹ Gill Donovan. “Half of Americans Unchurched, Study Finds.” National Catholic Reporter, 38. No 43. (October 2002):

¹⁰ Barna Group. “The State of the Church 2016.” National Black Robe Regiment. Entry posted September 29, 2016. <http://nationalblackroberegiment.com/state-church-2016/>

¹¹ Barna Group. “The State of the Church 2016.” National Black Robe Regiment. Entry posted September 29, 2016. <http://nationalblackroberegiment.com/state-church-2016/>

¹² Barna Group. “The State of the Church 2016.” National Black Robe Regiment. Entry posted September 29, 2016. <http://nationalblackroberegiment.com/state-church-2016/>

¹³ Jones, Jeffrey M. “U.S Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades.” Entry posted April 18, 2019 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>

¹⁴ Bradley, Jayson D. “The Ultimate Guide to Understanding and Growing Church Attendance.” Pushpay Blog, entry posted October 23, 2017. <https://pushpay.com/blog/church-attendance/>

steady rate of approximately 70% percent through the 1990s.¹⁵ The 15% precipitous fall has transitioned the dynamics of church culture climate in America.

Generational patterns are shifting. According to Peterson (2019), 40% of Millennials consider the bible to be a book of legends, fables, and moral precepts.¹⁶ Costello (2019) documents 40% of Millennials in the age range of 18-29 have no religious affiliation. The percentage of individuals with ties to a church has continued to decrease.¹⁷ Younger generations typically foster more apathetic views regarding the church in comparison to their older counterparts. Brumley (2016) states nearly six in 10 Millennials who were raised in the church eventually leave and consider themselves to have no religious affiliation.¹⁸ According to Bradley (2017), many Americans who identified as Protestant prior to the 1970s are deceased and were not very successful instilling their faith in their children.¹⁹ The faith fostered by older generations is no longer esteemed in the same regard. Many children who were raised in the church leave the church as adults.

¹⁵ Bradley, Jayson D. "The Ultimate Guide to Understanding and Growing Church Attendance." Pushpay Blog, entry posted October 23, 2017. <https://pushpay.com/blog/church-attendance/>

¹⁶ Doug Peterson. "Get the Facts." <https://www.rotw.com/get-facts>

¹⁷ Thomas Costello. "37 Church Statistics You Need to Know for 2019." <https://reachrightstudios.com/church-statistics-2019>

¹⁸ Brumley, Jeff. "As Millennials Leave the Church, Some Youth Ministers Ponder Scary Stats." Baptist News Global. Entry posted April 18, 2016. https://baptistnews.com/article/as-millennials-leave-the-church-some-youth-ministers-ponder-scary-stats/?gclid=Cj0KCCQiAI5zwBRCTARIsAIrukdnBxUK-DFaSkDIROBxJJhobX9Hff7iM-r_15avgm5btrX5d7WpV54kaAmDWEALw_wcB#.XgcT3kdKhPY

¹⁹ Jayson D. Bradley. "The Ultimate Guide to Understanding and Growing Church Attendance." Pushpay Blog, entry posted October 23, 2017. <https://pushpay.com/blog/church-attendance/>

This phenomenon is occurring across Protestant denominations. Cassidy (2018) states that every denomination across the nation has plenty of churches struggling to remain open.²⁰ According to Coleman (2002), some denominations have experienced as much a 34 percent decline in membership over the past several decades.²¹ Peterson (2019) reports two-thirds of all churches in America have no growth in membership or are declining in membership.²² Carter (2015) provides a different perspective stating the percentage of self-identifying Protestants has continued to decrease since the 1970s but the total number of actual Protestants has risen.²³ This suggest that the nation’s population increase in some instances is outpacing the growth of the Protestant church. However, in many cases, the actual numbers have legitimately declined. Nevertheless, the organized church in general is suffering and the impact of the church is questionable.

The facts demonstrate the challenge the church encounters to remain viable in a postmodern secular world. There is a growing disregard for the church and a lack of enthusiasm by many for organized religion. Various sources provide conflicting information regarding the percentage of church plants that survive beyond one year. Anecdotal accounts estimate that as many as fifty percent of new church plants close within a year. Depending on the source, it is commonly stated that 80 percent of all church plant efforts eventually fail and have their doors permanently closed. The validity to these figures is in question but no one denies that churches

²⁰ Captain Cassidy. “Wait, How Many Churches Close Per Year?” Patheos. Entry posted November 29, 2018. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rolltodisbelieve/2018/11/29/how-many-churches-close-per-year/>

²¹ Barbara Carrick Coleman. “Appealing to the Unchurched: What Attracts New Members.” *Journal of Public Nonprofit Sector Marketing*, 10, no. 1 (2002): 77.

²² Doug Peterson. “Get the Facts.” <https://www.rotw.com/get-facts>

²³ Joe Carter. “Fact Checker: Are All Christian Denominations in Decline.” *The Gospel Coalitions*. Entry posted March 17, 2015. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/factchecker-are-all-christian-denominations-in-decline/>

are closing. Nieuwhof (2019) states it is no secret that thousands of churches close annually.²⁴ Cassidy (2019) determined the church closure rate to be approximately 5,000 churches per year.²⁵ Morton (2019) cites the findings of Thom Rainer of Lifeway research that between 6,000 and 10,000 churches die yearly.²⁶ This number is approximately 100-200 churches closing each week. Smith (2019) challenges the credibility of the 6,000 to 10,000 church closure rate statistic and posits the best research demonstrates 3,850 – 7,700 churches close yearly.²⁷ This equates to 75 to 150 congregations dissolving each week. Variation in church closure statistics exist, however, the consensus among researchers is church closing rates are problematic. Churches are closing at an alarming rate and the closure rate continues to increase.

Further complicating the church closure issue are churches that are planted but have limited lasting vitality. Many church plants prematurely conclude and fail to survive or thrive with any longevity. This is directly linked to the mass exodus of people leaving the church. Krejcir (2007) asserts that 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity on an annual basis.²⁸ As millions of people exit, church doors are forced to close. Easum (2013) states many new church plants either do not make it beyond eighteen months as a ministry or remain so small they

²⁴ Carey Nieuwhof. “5 Good Reasons a Church Should Close.” <https://careynieuwhof.com/5-good-reasons-a-church-should-close/> (accessed December 23, 2019).

²⁵ Captain Cassidy. “Wait, How Many Churches Close Per Year?” Patheos. Entry posted November 29, 2018. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rolltodisbelieve/2018/11/29/how-many-churches-close-per-year/>

²⁶ Chris Morton. “Churches are Closing. These Four Models are Thriving.” Missio Alliance, entry posted February 4, 2019. <https://www.missioalliance.org/churches-are-closing-these-four-models-are-thriving/>

²⁷ Greg Smith. “Are 10,000 Churches Closing Every Year?.” Entry posted September 4, 2019. <https://sowhatfaith.com/2019/09/04/are-10000-churches-closing-every-year/>

²⁸ Richard J. Krejcir. “Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline.” Churchleadership.org Entry posted 2007 <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42346>.

struggle to barely survive as an entity.²⁹ According to Stetzer and Connor (2007), 32 percent of churches fail to exist four years after being started.³⁰ Stetzer and Bird (2010) cite a recent study that reveals 32 percent of church plants will permanently close by the 4-year anniversary church launch.³¹ Corley (2017) reports the North American Mission Board finds a 32 percent church closure rate across North America.³² Barrick (2007) says the latest research shows that 32 percent of roughly 4,000 churches planted yearly are not active beyond four years.³³ The data finds approximately one out of every three church plants are forced to prematurely permanently close their doors. Resources are exhausted, goals are not accomplished, and church planters are left with feelings of defeat from perceived mission failure.

The Hypotheses

This project will consider four hypotheses. The first hypothesis is avoiding identified mistakes that minimize the potential of a church to both survive and thrive will enhance the vitality of the church plant. The second hypothesis is implementing proven pragmatic strategies in the church plant effort will drastically improve the ministries chance to survive or thrive. The third hypothesis is the Bible is not the primary tool that many people use to implement church

²⁹ Bill Easum. "Church Plants, Why They Fail." The Effective Church Group, Entry posted May 31, 2013 <https://effectivechurch.com/church-plants-why-they-fail/>

³⁰ Ed Stetzer and Phillip Connor. "Church Plant and Survivability Study." Center for Missional Research, North American Mission Board. 2007. 13.

³¹ Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird. *Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers*. (Jossey-Bass, 2010), 101.

³² Lane Corley. "On Failed Church Plants: How Many are There? And Why?." Entry posted January 21, 2017, <https://lanecorley.com/2016/01/21/on-failed-church-plants-how-many-are-there-and-why>

³³ Audrey Barrick. "Study Reveals State of U.S Church Planting." The Christian Post, Entry Posted November 15, 2007 <https://www.christianpost.com/news/study-reveals-state-of-u-s-church-planting.html>

planting efforts. The fourth hypothesis is a significant percentage of church plants close within 4 years, but how this data is interpreted matters most.

Statement of Scope and Limitations

The scope of this project will target a single interdenominational church plant with limited resources. The church plant will be launched in the racially and culturally diverse city of Tampa, Florida. It is believed that the research will apply abroad. It will apply to church plants that have limited resources. The research will also benefit church planters that have abundant resources as they will not be hindered by certain obstacles that may stem from the limit in resources that this study may encounter.

Multiple limitations are evident. First, human resources are few. This means that services and ministries that are typically available at church may not be present. Available personnel will need to assume multiple roles and may be strained for time, energy, and resources. Secondly, finances are limited. This may present a problem financing essential ministry services such as music ministry singers and musicians. Third, this particular setting is very diverse. Strategies that may or may not be effective with this population may produce different results in other settings. Fourth, time is a limitation. Church plants require time to fully evaluate the success of the church. A church may flourish or struggle in the first 12 months and experience a reversal of fortune during the next 12 months. The time limitation will only provide a snapshot of the results as reflected for that particular time period.

The church will strive to be interdenominational and will begin with no denominational allegiances or affiliations. As such, this church plant will lack certain resources available to churches that have denominational connections. These resources may include finances, personnel, and expertise to facilitate the church plant procedure. This is a limitation as

denominations are important to many people. Denominations provide familiarity and are more prone to interest people who have the same denominational tie. People are less inclined to attend a church service that does not represent their denominational background. Denominations provide people with boundaries and cultivate a distinctive identity. Statistics show that 50 percent of people will not cross denominational lines. Finally, the church will be planted in an area that has multiple churches already in existence. This may impact the results of the study. Choosing another area is not an option because this particular area minimizes the limitation of finances that are available for the building budget.

Delimitations of Study

This study has several noteworthy delimitations. The first delimitation is that of ministry personnel. Research shows that personnel are an important variable for ministry and church plants. Churches that begin with a ministry team are more prone to have better results. Unfortunately, personnel typically require finances that are not available. Services that may be the norm or essential and provided by a ministry team will not be immediately available. Ministry cost money and many ministers, including worship leaders, teachers, musicians etc. require a salary. This may be an impediment for certain seekers.

Secondly, this study will not attempt to implement every strategy that research shows to be effective. Resources are limited and only a few feasible strategies will be utilized in the study. Strategies that require exorbitant finances or focus on human personnel will not be employed. Only options that correspond to the resources available will be considered.

The final delimitation is that of thorough preparation and planning. The desire is to begin the church planting process with proper planning to produce momentum for the ministry. Thorough preparation and planning are needed for the best results, but preparation and planning

involves a time variable. Time, preparation, and planning are intimately linked. A rushed church planting endeavor will ultimately sacrifice the benefits of thorough preparation and planning.

Literature Review

This Thesis Project includes many sources to expose the dilemma the church is facing and the methods that demonstrate ability to rectify the current concern. The outline of this review consists of the following and will divide the literature into 7 topics: Avoid Mistakes, Great Start, Leadership, Evangelism, Invitations, Visitor Retention, and Prayer. These topics are an integral element of this Thesis Project as they represent the key strategies that the literature sources suggest help to improve church planting survivability and growth.

Avoid Mistakes

An important part of this project will address avoiding mistakes when church planting. Ben Arment book *Church in the Making: What Makes or Breaks a New Church Before it Starts* is a meaningful source for this project. In the book that author talks about the mistake of the premature launch. The author concludes that there is nothing more destructive in church planting than starting with no momentum.³⁴ A source of literature used is an article by Norm Voth “Why Plant New Congregations?” This article discusses the importance of church planting but also details the risk that are involved in the process. The book *It’s Personal: Surviving and Thriving on the Journey of Church Planting* by Brian Bloye and Amy Bloye contributes to the project as it deals with unforeseen obstacles that inhibit church growth and the reality that a church plant never goes according to script. A book by Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird entitled

³⁴ Ben Arment. *Church in the Making: What Makes or Breaks a New Church Before It Starts*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 42.

Viral Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers is a source written by veteran church planters. It addresses church planting obstacles and the fact that they can be overcome. Jim Collins' book *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't* is a book on organizational leadership and the role leaders play to advance organizational success. His book highlights avoiding mistakes by not allowing problems to persist. The book promotes recognizing existing problems and making necessary adjustments. James Griffith and William Easum book *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts* identifies the most prominent mistakes that occur in church planting and gives the means to avoid the mistakes. *Church in the Making: What Makes or Breaks a New Church Before It Starts* authored by Ben Amen is a source that refers to inhibiting mistakes that prevent a church plant from gaining momentum. The book *To Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City* by Eric Swanson and Sam Williams emphasize the point of adaptation to mistakes for improvements. Swanson and Williams (2010) state that sometimes change does not come from doing things better but from doing things differently.³⁵ *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* authored by Craig Ott and Gene Wilson deal with the best practices of church planting and the bible based principles that church planting. It is a key source for this project as it gives insight to the role of preparation and the magnitude of the grueling task of planting a growing flourishing church.

The literature reveals that learning from history is a way to avoid church planting mistakes. The book *Church Planting and Discipleship: Unlocking the Feasible Growth* by Lawrence Chipao is a valuable source for this project. The author explains how the novelty of

³⁵ Eric Swanson and Sam Williams. *To Transform a City: Whole Church, Whole Gospel, Whole City*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 68.

church planting leads to inevitable mistakes. According to the author most church planters do not realize how much starting a new church entails until after they have done it.³⁶ The novelty of the experience leads to inevitable mistakes. Robert J. Vajko article “Ten Mistakes Church Planters Can Make” is a pivotal source as it gives obvious mistakes in church planting, ways to avoid the mistakes, and examines the value of counsel and mentorship in church planting.

Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership by John Dickson accentuates the wisdom in learning from church planting pioneers and predecessors. Dickson (2011) states the value of learning from history is difficult to overstate.³⁷

Great Start

The literature underscores the profit to be gained from the great start in church planting. Mark Mittelberg’s book *Becoming a Contagious Church: Increasing Your Church’s Evangelistic Temperature* speaks of the success that comes from being prepared. *Church is a Team Sport: A Championship Strategy for Doing Ministry Together* is a source that connects a great start to the great effort exerted in preparation. *Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting: A Guide for Starting Any Kind of Church* by Aubrey Malphurs is a source that presents practical factors of church planting and methods to plant churches that prosper and grow.

Teamwork is a predominant theme church planting literature links to growth. *Disciple Shift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* by Jim Putman, Robert Coleman, and Bobby Harrington is a source that advocates church planting with teamwork and collaboration. The book centers on the gifts God has placed in the church the part

³⁶ Lawrence Chipao. *Church Planting and Discipleship: Unlocking the Feasible Growth*. (Malawi: Luviri Press, 2017), 16.

³⁷ John Dickson. *Humilitas: A Lost Key to Life, Love, and Leadership*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 18.

each gift assumes in equipping a church to function more effectively. Dave Rogalsky's article "Emerging Church Plants" advances the idea of people participation and teamwork for a great start. The author contends church planters who remain alone remain seldom grow congregations beyond two dozen.³⁸ Stephen Gray's book *Planting Fast-Growing Churches* offers relevant statistics regarding fast growing churches and uses statistical data to show how people participation propels church growth. *For the City* by Darrin Patrick and Matt Carter further expound the idea of the Great Start and also links people participation to the growth and advancement of newly planted churches. William Easum and Bil Cornelius book *Go BIG!: Lead Your Church to Explosive Growth* describes the heart of God and the reasons God wants a church plant to experience growth. Corder's book *Connect: How to Grow Your Church in 28-Days Guaranteed* presents easy to apply practical methods to begin a church with an excellent start. The author states specifically what must be done to facilitate church growth. *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* by George Barna and David Kinnaman discuss demographics and the ideal way to connect with the unchurched population group. Research statistics are presented in Rick Richardson's book *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith*. Richardson uses demographic statistics and explains how to reach new people and build connections to expand church growth.

Leadership

The literature establishes leadership as a prime component of church planting. Edwin G. Bontrager and Nathan D. Showalter book *It Can Happen Today!: Principles of Church Growth From the Book of Acts* presents principles for growth. The book details the role of leadership

³⁸ Dave Rogalsky. "Emerging Church Plants." *Canadian Mennonite* 12, no. 5 (March 2008): 17.

and asserts trust in leadership forms the foundation for genuine church growth.³⁹ *Leadership That Works: Hope and Direction for Church and Parachurch Leaders in Today's Complex World* describes effective leadership and the difficulties and intricacies of the leadership charge. Adding to the leadership subject Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary McGee book *Introducing World Missions, A Biblical, Historical and Practical Survey* likewise place leadership as a focal point of church growth but stress the challenge of leadership. The authors profess when tough decisions are to be made, the leader is there to assume that role.⁴⁰ The source *Effectiveness by the Numbers: Counting What Counts in the Church* chronicles the importance of the leadership duty. Despite the burden and accountability of leadership the author states a common denominator for highly functioning effective churches is exemplary leadership.⁴¹

Great leadership trains and develops others to become leaders. *Jesus Never Said to Plant Churches: And 12 More Things They Never Told Me About Church Planting* by Trinity Jordan outlines that function. The author says church planters must learn to equip, release, and delegate leaders to operate in the work of the church.⁴² Bob Roberts Jr.'s book *The Multiplying Church: The New Math for Starting New Churches* asserts that church growth is the fruit of leadership development. According to Bob Roberts Jr., a new church plant will only grow to the level and quality of developed active leaders in the church.⁴³

³⁹ Edwin G. Bontrager and Nathan D. Showalter. *It Can Happen Today!: Principles of Church Growth From the Book of Acts*. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1986), 66.

⁴⁰ Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary McGee, *Introducing World Missions, A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 229.

⁴¹ William R. Hoyt. *Effectiveness by the Numbers: Counting What Counts in the Church*, (Abingdon Press, 2007), 61.

⁴² Trinity Jordan. *Jesus Never Said to Plant Churches: And 12 More Things They Never Told Me About Church Planting*. (Mansfield: Influence Resources, 2012), 57.

⁴³ Bob Roberts Jr. *The Multiplying Church: The New Math for Starting New Churches*. (Grand

Evangelism

Church planting literature esteems evangelism as the lifeline for growth. It is a simple facet that is comprised of many interwoven parts. In *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory*, Scott Sunquist the author characterizes evangelism as God's mission for the lost world and depicts it as the witness and mandate of the church to reach the lost. The source *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional* by Alvin Reid simplifies evangelism and portrays as the communication of the gospel by the church to people out of relationship with Christ.⁴⁴ An aspect of evangelism is meeting needs. The source *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them* by Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley and Jason Hayes describe the impact churches make when meeting needs. The book declares churches that evangelize the unchurched by meeting real needs make a positive difference in the world.⁴⁵ Dave Donaldson and Wendell Vinson book *City Serve: Your Guide to Church-Based Compassion* illustrates the connection of evangelism through meeting needs and winning lost souls to Christ. The article "Church Planting Strategies" by T. Dyck detail how the means of evangelism and meeting needs cause people to come to church and compel them to remain connected. The source refers to history to show that many people will not come to the church or remain at the church if they have no specific need for the church.⁴⁶ *City Serve: Your Guide to Church-Based Compassion* by Dave Donaldson and Wendell Vinson talks church

Rapids:Zondervan, 2008), 148.

⁴⁴ Alvin Reid. *Evangelism Handbook: Biblical, Spiritual, Intentional, Missional*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 21.

⁴⁵ Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes. *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 153.

⁴⁶ T. Dyck. "Church Planting Strategies." *Canadian Mennonite*, 10, no. 5 (March 2006): 2.

planting and growing by attuning to the community and its needs. Strategic church planting literature pictures effective evangelism as being a united system of partnerships and collaboration. Unity is promoted and the Kingdom of God is advanced. Neil Power and John James book *Together for the City: How Collaborative Church Planting Leads to Citywide Movements* emphasize how evangelism and collaboration promotes unity and enables the Kingdom of God to advance. According to Powell and James (2019), churches working together in collaboration are strategically able to reach the community for the cause of Christ.⁴⁷

Invitations

Church planting literature indicates personal invites is a main reason unchurched people visit a church. *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* by Thom S. Rainer provides profound applicable church attendance figures. Rainer (1999) discovered that 80 percent of church visitors rank invitation from friend, family member, or coworker as the most common motivation for visiting a church.⁴⁸ The statistical research findings of George Barna and David Kinnaman in the book *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* is a source that support the value of personal invitations from friends. Their research findings reveal invitations from friends is rated the number one method to establish connections with the unchurched.⁴⁹ The source *Ten Most*

⁴⁷ Neil Powell and John James. *Together for the City: How Collaborative Church Planting Leads to Citywide Movements*. (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 7.

⁴⁸ Thom S. Rainer. *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 91.

⁴⁹ George Barna and David Kinnaman. *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*. (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 27.

Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts by James Griffith and William Easum discuss invitations and the collective teamwork needed for a church plant to thrive.

Visitor Retention

Church plant longevity results from the ability of the church to attract people to the church. If the church cannot attract visitors, the church will not survive and will not grow. The source *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts* by James Griffith and William Easum reports the urgency of visitor attendance in church planting. The authors emphatically declare church planting is about getting people in the seats and then getting more people in the seats. The preponderance of literature sources utilized for this Thesis Project address enhancing church attendance numbers and visitor retention.

Prayer

Prayer is the means to usher the manifestation of the will of God on earth. Church planting advances the Kingdom of God and accomplishes His mission. The Bible is a primary source to discuss the importance of prayer. In Matthew 6, Jesus tells His disciples to pray that God's kingdom would come, and His will would be done in earth as it is in heaven. The book *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* by Craig Ott and Gene Wilson addresses church planting and the spiritual reality of that feat. *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts* by James Griffith and William Easum explores the spiritual reality of church planting and the spiritual resistance that ensues when planting a church. The authors suggest church planting is not benign activity and spiritual resistance is inevitable.⁵⁰ This source illuminates the activity of the spiritual realm, advocates the necessity

⁵⁰ James Griffith and William Easum. *Ten Most Common Mistakes Made by New Church Starts*, (Chalice Press, 2008), 16.

urgency for prayer to seeks God's will and the urgency to utilize prayer as a weapon of spiritual war to plant churches that grow.

Biblical and Theological Basis

The biblical and theological basis for church planting begins with the love of God and His love for humanity. According to 1 John, God is love. God is love personified. This is demonstrated consistently in His character, nature, and His acts for and toward people. Scripture explicitly affirms this love and conveys a message of the love of God for people. Genesis 1 states that man is created in the very image of God. When God sees humanity, He sees himself as God deliberately created man to be a reflection of who He is. When man failed in the Garden of Eden, God refuses to destroy humanity but prophesies a provision for a plan of redemption. Psalms 8 asks why God is mindful of man. John 3:16 accentuates God's love for people. The biblical verse states that God loves the world to the extent that He was willing to send His only Son Jesus Christ as the ultimate sacrifice for mankind. It is this act of love informs of His affection for humanity and His desire to redeem all of mankind. God's love for people is so profound that Romans 5 states that God shows his love for people that while humanity was still in sin Christ died for sinners. Ephesians 2 states that God's great love for people is exemplified by the fact that while people were dead in trespasses, He makes them alive in Christ and saves them by His grace. II Peter 3 states that it is not the will of God that any should perish. God's love is biblical and his desire to save man is apparent. However, love is not the only variable that establishes a rationale for church planting.

Church planting is a means of direct fulfillment of the Great Commission of Christ. In Matthew 28, Jesus commissions the apostles to make disciples of all nations. Mark 16 parallels these sentiments as Jesus instructs the disciples to reach the world and preach the gospel to every

creature. In Acts 1, Jesus tells the Apostles to wait on the Holy Spirit. He states that the Holy Spirit would give them power to be a witness to the nations and the uttermost parts of the earth. In Luke 19, Jesus states His mission as coming to seek and save those who are lost. Romans 1 says that the gospel of Christ is the power of God to save the Jew and the Greek. Revelations 22 states whoever desires to come, let that person come. Proverbs 11 says that the person that wins souls is wise. It is undeniable that it is not God's will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Church planting is an effective means to reach the nations, fulfill Jesus instructions, and accomplish God's will for people.

Statement of Methodology

This project will begin with statistics of the literature findings. Qualitative research will be used to assess people's perceptions regarding church planting statistics. This research method will involve a questionnaire that will be given to combined total of 26 church laity and church clergy affiliates to survey how these numbers are perceived and interpreted. The questionnaire will provide valid church planting statistics in terms of the percentages that survive beyond a five-year window. A total of 18 questions will be asked. 3 questions to determine research participation eligibility, 13 open ended questions and 2 closed question in reference to these statistical figures. These questions include the following:

- How do you interpret these numbers?
- What can be done to improve these statistics?
- Why are so many churches closing?
- Why do churches flourish?
- Is the church successful?
- What are 10 reasons churches are successful?

- What are 10 reasons churches are not successful?
- Is the church successful?
- How do you define success?
- Should the church be doing something differently?
- What should be the church be doing differently?
- What causes a person to visit a church?
- What causes a person to join a church (become a member)?
- Why do people sever ties with a church (withdraw membership)?
- Why do people leave the church (the body of Christ)?

The questionnaire is a tool to be employed to determine how actual church plant success and failure rates are perceived by people. This questionnaire will provide insight of both clergy and church laity perception. Trends in perceptions will be evaluated and detailed. The Bible will be used as a tool to thoroughly investigate this issue. The results of the questionnaire and the biblical investigation will be compared and contrasted. The intent is to see if people foster biblically appropriate perceptions regarding these numbers.

The second chapter will address strategies that are best practices for church planting. These strategies will be researched based methods that have proven to produce favorable outcome in church planting. The methods will be effective strategies that seasoned church planters have previously employed with success. Chapter two will also discuss mistakes to avoid. Mistakes will include approaches that church planting pioneers have used in the past and experience has revealed the practices to be futile and detrimental to church planting efforts. The purpose is to provide 7 strategies that facilitate church growth and eliminate variables that waste time and resources and hinder church growth.

The third chapter will explore a biblical perspective and principles of church planting. The Bible will be critically examined to locate key biblical passages to identify biblical principles for church planting and better understand God's view of church planting. The Bible is the source of all truth especially regarding spiritual activity. Both Old Testament and New Testament biblical references will be given to determine the Bible's position on the church planting process. Church planting is the work of God and as such is inherently spiritual in nature. Biblical principles and perspective will be examined to provide insight and guide the church plant process.

The fourth chapter will detail the human research findings. These findings will be based on the results of the online church survey questionnaire. The survey will include 15 questions that address church planting statistics. Both church clergy and laity will be solicited for their personal view of current church planting statistical figures. Church clergy and laity will give their opinions regarding the collective success of the church, their definition of success, the means to improve church planting statistics, factors that contribute to church growth, reasons people leave the church, things the church should do differently, and other opinion based questions to gather insight on the views of church clergy and laity. In chapter 4, the human research findings will be documented and both patterns in opinions and outlier views will be discussed.

The fifth chapter will summarize all the major points of the project. This chapter will include a discussion of the church survey results in relation to the literature. The church survey results will be compared with biblical perspective. This chapter will discuss the church survey results that complement the biblical perspective of the process and examine disparities between the survey results and the Bible. Biblical perspective and biblical principles combined with

research-based strategies will be analyzed to enlighten the understanding of church planters when church planting. All information will then be synthesized. It is believed that the human research findings will drastically differ from the biblical perspective of church planting. The summary of results in relation to the four project hypotheses will be explored determine if the four project hypotheses assertions are correct. Implications of the results for practice will be reported. Recommendations for further research will be detailed. Chapter five and the Thesis Project will conclude with the benefits of implementing the strategies, principles, and perspective of the research findings. The author is influenced by the preconceived notion that it is impossible to fail when doing the work of God. It is fully expected that results of this project will demonstrate and support the position that proven practical approaches, biblical principles, and proper perspective reduce failure factors in church planting. Failure is not an option and success is guaranteed.

Chapter 2

Overview

The Great Commission instructs Christian believers to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Fulfilling this commission is met with many challenges and obstacles. The population of the American country is rapidly increasing. Demographics of the country continue to shift. The United States of American is now widely considered one of the fastest growing mission fields around the globe. Yet the relevance of the American Christian church as evidenced by empirical evidence continues to shrink. Matthew 9 states, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” There is great need to plant churches and to plant more churches to reap the harvest the bible promises to yield.

The current culture and religious climate in America require assertive action by the church to remain relevant. According to Chipao (2017), there are some general principles that church planters have used with success.⁵¹ Morton (2019) states models that are thriving both now and, in the future, will common elements.⁵² Certain methods are used by church planters that consistently demonstrate a record for effectiveness. Successful strategic planning includes effective strategies that have a proven history for results.

In church planting there is much to consider. McSwain (2014) suggest there are changing trends that impact churchgoing in America.⁵³ A plethora of factors contribute to church survivability. Easum (2013) says there are mistakes that keep a church plant from

⁵¹ Chipao, *Church Planting and Discipleship*, 16.

⁵² Chris Morton. “Churches are Closing. These Four Models are Thriving.” Missio Alliance, entry posted February 4, 2019. <https://www.missioalliance.org/churches-are-closing-these-four-models-are-thriving/>

⁵³ Steve McSwain. “Why Nobody Wants to go to Church Anymore.” Huffpost, entry posted October, 14, 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-nobody-wants-to-go-to_b_4086016

reaching its potential.⁵⁴ According to Kschull (2018), many churches have a simple choice to change or die.⁵⁵ The prophet Hosea cites ignorance as a persistent problem. Hosea 4:6 states my people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge. Chipao (2017) furthers this notion by stating many church planters have no idea how much is involved in starting a church.⁵⁶ A lack of knowledge in the process will be problematic and potentially inhibit the possibility of numerical growth. Payne (2015) assert entering the field without a strategy is to plan for failure.⁵⁷ Preparation involves planning and strategy. Optimal outcomes stem from preparation that begins with a clear plan of action. Strategy provides direction and guides the course of action for the endeavor. Church planting efforts that lack planning, strategy, and preparation have a greater probability of premature closure. Strategy alone will not suffice.

The author utilizes a long history of statistics to argue the American Christian church is on decline and losing influence and interest from the general public. The author presents data to show that most churches have plateaued or are on the decline. Data is also presented to illuminate the fact that many new church plants are challenged to grow, struggle to flourish, and 1 out of every 3 new church plants close within 4 years of launching. The author discusses the purpose of church planting, common obstacles encountered in church planting and establishes a

⁵⁴ Bill Easum. "Church Plants, Why They Fail." The Effective Church Group, Entry posted May 31, 2013 <https://effectivechurch.com/church-plants-why-they-fail/>

⁵⁵ Kshull. "Hope For Dying Churches." Facts & Trends. Entry posted January 16, 2018. <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/16/hope-for-dying-churches/>

⁵⁶ Chipao, *Church Planting and Discipleship*, 16.

⁵⁷ J.D. Payne. *Apostolic Church Planting: Birthing New Churches from New Believers*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 109.

foundation for church planting. The author also exposes reasons new church plants close prematurely and provides 7 keys to facilitate optimal outcomes in church planting.

State of the Church in America

Any research regarding Christianity in America and the state of church growth shows that it is in decline.⁵⁸ Statistics abound showing decrease in church attendance numbers and expose an exodus of masses leaving the church. Increasing numbers of people in American society simply have no desire to affiliate with organized institutional religion or what is typically referred to as the church.⁵⁹ The church is losing influence and social status for an increasing proportion of the American public.⁶⁰ The relevance of the church is seemingly diminishing. For many the church has become largely inconsequential and church attendance is no longer considered a normative aspect of American life. Thousands are exiting the church daily. Many who remain in church are becoming less and less active.⁶¹ Peterson (2019) claim 70 percent of youth raised in church leave as young adults and further state approximately 44 percent of all U.S adults report God has no role in their life.⁶² According to Duffin (2019), only a little more than a fifth of Americans attend church on a weekly basis.⁶³ Barna and Kinnaman (2014) report an increase of 30 percent in the number of unchurched individuals over the past decade, with

⁵⁸ Roberts Jr, *The Multiplying Church*, 23.

⁵⁹ Swanson and Williams, *To Transform a City*, 10.

⁶⁰ Rick Richardson. *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith*. (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 11.

⁶¹ Rainer, *High Expectations*, 14.

⁶² Doug Peterson. "Get the Facts." <https://www.rotw.com/get-facts>

⁶³ Erin Duffin. "Church Attendance of Americans 2018." Statista. Entry posted August 9, 2019. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/245491/church-attendance-of-americans/>

over 156 million US residents not affiliated with a Christian church.⁶⁴ Many people identify themselves as “spiritual, but not religious.” The “spiritual, but not religious,” are people who dissociate from organized religion and reject organized religion as the sole or most valuable means of advancing personal spiritual growth.⁶⁵ The “Nones” population is also growing. “Nones” are those who respond to surveys as having no preference for any religion in particular and express no allegiance for any religious organization.⁶⁶ “Nones” consists of agnostics, atheists, and people who respond to surveys as being “nothing in particular.” Apathy for the church, organized religion, and the entity of God abound. Disinterest is evident and the image and impact of the church continues to diminish

According to Green (2015), more than 4,000 new churches opened doors in 2014 outpacing the 3,700 that officially closed.⁶⁷ However, growing churches are rare. Only 20 percent of churches today are growing. 80 percent of churches have plateaued or are declining in membership.⁶⁸ Ferguson and Ferguson (2010) report fewer than 20 percent of Americans regularly attend church, half of all American churches did not add one person through conversion in 2014, and an astonishing forty-three thousand Americans permanently leave the church on a weekly basis.⁶⁹ Some denominations have experienced as much as 34 percent

⁶⁴ Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 33.

⁶⁵ Carol J. Williams and Robert C. Fuller. *Spiritual, but Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America*. (Cary: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2001), 6.

⁶⁶ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 11.

⁶⁷ Lisa C. Green. "Study: Thousands of Churches Closing Every Year, But There is a Silver Lining, entry posted December 9, 2015 <https://www.charismanews.com/us/53715-study-thousands-of-churches-closing-every-year-but-there-is-a-silver-lining>

⁶⁸ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 60.

⁶⁹ Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson. *Exponential*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

decline in membership over the past several decades.⁷⁰ The plight of American Protestant churches has been better, but overall, the numbers are not good. Over the last three years, 31 percent of Protestant churches demonstrated growth, but 59 percent have plateaued or are currently declining.⁷¹ Unfortunately, much of what is deemed “church growth” is really transfer growth.⁷² Most growth in Protestant churches is transfer growth which occurs at the expense of other churches. Transfer growth happens when individuals transfer allegiance from one church to another as opposed to new converts establishing a newly found relationship with Christ. Critical analysis reveals only 10 percent of Protestant churches are experiencing growth by conversion of unchurched people.⁷³

From 1990-2000, the national population of the U.S showed an increase of approximately 11 percent, but the collective membership in the Protestant denomination dwindled by 9.5 percent.⁷⁴ According to Carter (2015), the percentage of self-identifying Protestants has continually decreased since the 1970s, but the total number of actual Protestants has risen.⁷⁵ This suggest the nation’s population increase in instances is outpacing the growth of the Protestant church. In many cases, the actual membership numbers have legitimately declined. Nevertheless, the organized church in general continues to suffer and the impact of the church in America remains in question.

⁷⁰ Coleman, “Appealing to the Unchurched,” 77.

⁷¹ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 7.

⁷² Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 9.

⁷³ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 7.

⁷⁴ Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 3.

⁷⁵ Joe Carter. “Fact Checker: Are All Christian Denominations in Decline.” The Gospel Coalitions. Entry posted March 17, 2015. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/factchecker-are-all-christian-denominations-in-decline/>

Most churches are not reaching new people and many Americans are trending away from congregational involvement.⁷⁶ Statistics illuminate the challenge of the church to remain viable in today's secular world. There is growing disregard for the church and a lack of enthusiasm by many for organized religion. Not only are church attendance and membership on the decline but churches are closing. Cassidy (2019) states that approximate 5,000 church closures per year.⁷⁷ According to Smith (2019), the number of churches closing annually range between 3,850 and 7,700.⁷⁸ Thom Rainer of Lifeway research finds the church closure rate to be between 6,000 and 10,000 each year. These numbers represent a church closure rate between 75-200 each week. Church statistics vary but churches are closing at an alarming rate.

Further complicating the issue are new church plants that lack lasting longevity. A significant number of church plants close prematurely. This is linked to the growing disinterest of masses who have left and are leaving the church. According to Krejcir (2007), 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity annually.⁷⁹ One in four Americans are finished with church while an astonishing 48 percent of Americans are simply done with God.⁸⁰ As millions leave the church, thousands of churches close their doors for good. Statistics reveal many new church plants fail to last beyond eighteen months or remain so small they struggle to survive.⁸¹ 32

⁷⁶ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 11.

⁷⁷ Captain Cassidy. "Wait, How Many Churches Close Per Year?" Patheos. Entry posted November 29, 2018. <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rolltodisbelieve/2018/11/29/how-many-churches-close-per-year/>

⁷⁸ Greg Smith. "Are 10,000 Churches Closing Every Year?." Entry posted September 4, 2019. <https://sowhatfaith.com/2019/09/04/are-10000-churches-closing-every-year/>

⁷⁹ Richard J. Krejcir. "Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline." Churchleadership.org Entry posted 2007 <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42346>.

⁸⁰ Doug Peterson. "Get the Facts." <https://www.rotw.com/get-facts> (accessed December 22, 2019).

⁸¹ Bill Easum. "Church Plants, Why They Fail." The Effective Church Group, Entry posted May 31, 2013 <https://effectivechurch.com/church-plants-why-they-fail/>

percent of church plants no longer exist four years after launch.⁸² According to Barrick (2007), research shows 32 percent of roughly 4,000 churches planted yearly are not active beyond four years.⁸³ Anderson (2001) estimates three out of five new church plants in America close within five years.⁸⁴ The most widely accepted figures conclude one out of three church plants prematurely permanently close their doors. Resources are exhausted, goals are not accomplished, and church planters are left with feelings of defeat from perceived mission failure.

Ministry leaders aspire to lead growing churches that reach people, effect change, and exercise influence in the community. The reality of these aspirations often fails to live up to expectations. Instead, churches are shrinking in numerical size and impact. Many churches feel marginalized and powerless leaving leaders feeling like failures. Reports continue to emerge showing that less people are attending church.⁸⁵ According to Peterson (2019), weekly church attendance has experienced a 20 percent decline in the last 4 years.⁸⁶ Crary (2019) agrees and reports a 20 percent decrease in the percentage of American adults who are affiliated with church or other religious organizations over the past two decades.⁸⁷ Richardson (2019) suggest a few population segments have shown relative stability in church over the past two decades but most

⁸² Stetzer and Connor, "Church Plant and Survivability Study," 13.

⁸³ Audrey Barrick. "Study Reveals State of U.S Church Planting." The Christian Post, Entry Posted November 15, 2007 <https://www.christianpost.com/news/study-reveals-state-of-u-s-church-planting.html>

⁸⁴ Leith Anderson. *Leadership That Works: Hope and Direction for Church and Parachurch Leaders in Today's Complex World*. (Grand Rapids: Bethany House Publishers, 2001), 76.

⁸⁵ Jayson D. Bradley. "The Ultimate Guide to Understanding and Growing Church Attendance." Pushpay Blog, entry posted October 23, 2017. <https://pushpay.com/blog/church-attendance/>

⁸⁶ Doug Peterson. "Get the Facts." <https://www.rotw.com/get-facts>

⁸⁷ David Crary. "Poll: Church Membership in U.S Plummetts Over Past 20 Years." AP News. Entry posted April, 18 2019 <https://apnews.com/f15241378057486ea437cad490a2ed67>

people groups in America demonstrate church attendance in decline.⁸⁸ Barna and Kinnaman (2014) state that there is no single demographic for which church attendance is on the rise.⁸⁹ The precarious predicament of the church reflects the changing trends of American culture. McSwain (2014) states that there are changing trends that impact church attendance in America.⁹⁰ Adaptation and revised approaches in ministry are needed to garner the attention of the community, sustain ministry viability, and stimulate numerical growth. The willingness to change and adapt is vital. Many churches must make a simple choice to change or die.⁹¹

Church Planting Purpose

History has demonstrated that churches planted twenty-five, fifty, or a hundred years ago are challenged to reach future generations.⁹² History has shown that most established churches tend to stagnate, plateau, and decline. Established churches are seldom willing to reinvent itself and take the necessary steps to achieve greater levels of success. They are often hindered by ineffective traditions and established practices and exhibit great reluctance to change. There are usually little to no steps taken to appeal or attract new people. Because of this, new people are less inclined to go to already existing churches.

2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” The church is the vehicle God has sovereignly opted to use to call the world to

⁸⁸ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 11.

⁸⁹ Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 9.

⁹⁰ Steve McSwain. “Why Nobody Wants to go to Church Anymore.” Huffpost, entry posted October, 14, 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-nobody-wants-to-go-to_b_4086016

⁹¹ Kshull. “Hope For Dying Churches.” Facts & Trends. Entry posted January 16, 2018. <https://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/16/hope-for-dying-churches/>

⁹² Roberts Jr., *The Multiplying Church*, 72.

repentance by establishing relationship with Christ.⁹³ The need for new churches through church planting is substantial. It is the tool through which the kingdom of God is expeditiously established and spread throughout the earth. It is biblically based and is the evangelism paradigm described in the book of Acts. It is a means to participate in the mission of God to reconcile people through relationship with Jesus Christ.⁹⁴ His mission is the source that motivates the activities of all church affairs. The work of the church is to give God glory and reach people.⁹⁵ Church planting is the means to achieve the greatest kingdom results or reaching the lost. As such, it is God's desire for churches to flourish and grow as people submit their lives to faith in Christ.⁹⁶

New churches that are better equipped to reach the ever expanding and diversifying culture and are more apt to reach the unchurched. Statistics corroborate new church plants grow faster and reach greater proportions of unchurched people. They have the liberty to try novel approaches that established churches may be more reluctant to try.⁹⁷ They are more effective at inviting and assimilating new converts into the community of faith.⁹⁸ They tend to have a clearer vision for evangelism and a greater freedom to allow for novel expressions of faith that are more

⁹³ Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 84.

⁹⁴ Norm Voth. "Why Plant New Congregations?" *Canadian Mennonite* 12, no. 24 (December 2008): 9.

⁹⁵ Brian Bloye and Amy Bloye. *It's Personal: Surviving and Thriving on the Journey of Church Planting*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 147.

⁹⁶ Aubrey Malphurs. *Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting: A Guide for Starting Any Kind of Church*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

⁹⁷ Roberts Jr., *The Multiplying Church*, 72.

⁹⁸ Voth, "Why Plant New Congregations," 9.

reflective of cultural diversity. This translates into greater appeal for unchurched people and better results in new converts coming into relationship with Christ.

Advancing God’s kingdom is paramount. Planting new churches furthers the causes of God. Scripture illuminates God’s plan and desire for reconciliation and restoration of mankind. Church planting is the best way to advance God’s mission and to take the church to the community to the people it strives to serve.⁹⁹ Masses have left the church. Regular attendance is less but many who don’t attend church have valid reasons.¹⁰⁰ In many instances, this is linked to negative experiences with the church or church leadership.¹⁰¹ A 2018 survey shows 28 percent of Americans never attend church in contrast to 22 percent of Americans who attend every week.¹⁰² However, the bleak and dismal state of the church has a silver lining. The current pace of approximately four thousand new church plants annually not exceed the number of churches that are closing per year.¹⁰³ According to Richardson (2019), one-third of unchurched Americans expect to return to the church in the future.¹⁰⁴ The harvest truly is plentiful. Truth and perspective are tools to engage and empower the church to strategically proceed with boldness.

⁹⁹ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Costtello. “37 Church Statistics You Need to Know for 2019.” <https://reachrightstudios.com/church-statistics-2019> (accessed December 22, 2019).

¹⁰¹ Williams and Fuller, *Spiritual, but Not Religious*, 6.

¹⁰² Erin Duffin. “Church Attendance of Americans 2018.” Statista. Entry posted August 9, 2019. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/245491/church-attendance-of-americans/>

¹⁰³ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 69.

Church Planting Obstacles

The structure and traditions of the church can be a great obstacle to reaching people and impacting the community. Failure is not the only option for a struggling churches and church plants.¹⁰⁵ A plethora of factors contribute to church survivability. The only way to ensure the advancement of God’s agenda and radically increase the numbers of people establishing relationship with Christ in a community is to increase the number of churches.¹⁰⁶ Churches and church planters must be willing to incorporate strategies to facilitate the process. This may require a change in mentality that may be achieved through simply committing to change. The ultimate objective in the mission of God is continual growth both spiritually and numerically.¹⁰⁷ Unity and support for a cause that is greater than any individual is crucial. This entails a vision for ministry that embraces and instills evangelism. An outreach mentality must be embedded in the DNA of the church. This vision cannot be limited to the pastor, church planter, or leaders but must be accepted, advanced, and owned by the church in totality.

There are mistakes that keep churches and church plants from reaching its potential.¹⁰⁸ Church planters should learn from others who already experienced success. Morton (2019) states current models that are now thriving and will thrive in the future will have common elements.¹⁰⁹ Certain methods are used by church planters that consistently demonstrate a record for effectiveness. Cooperation is at the core. This involves cooperating with people, churches,

¹⁰⁵ Arment, *Church in the Making*, 21.

¹⁰⁶ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 199.

¹⁰⁷ Malphurs, *Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, 21.

¹⁰⁸ Bill Easum. “Church Plants, Why They Fail.” The Effective Church Group, Entry posted May 31, 2013 <https://effectivechurch.com/church-plants-why-they-fail/>

¹⁰⁹ Chris Morton. “Churches are Closing. These Four Models are Thriving.” Missio Alliance, entry posted February 4, 2019, <https://www.missioalliance.org/churches-are-closing-these-four-models-are-thriving/>

and other networks that currently advance church planting efforts. This allows for training, prayer, resources, and networking to help the cause of kingdom advancement. Strategy must shape the course of action. Strategy entails the synthesizing of calling, values, purpose, vision, resources, and effort. Strategy begins by establishing mission destination and planning a course to arrive. It details the targeted people group, the methodology for reaching them, the costs of the endeavor, and a timeline for milestones and goals.¹¹⁰ The best approach is to adopt simple practices that include research and application that have demonstrated proven results.

Church Planting Foundation

It is imperative that any church planting initiative begin with the view of God's mission in the world.¹¹¹ Church planting is kingdom work. Expanding God's kingdom by reaching and converting people to Christ is the mission of God. The current culture and religious climate in America require assertive action by the church to remain relevant. There are some general principles that church planters have used with success.¹¹² Church planting and church growth should incorporate methods that are simple and easily reproducible. Applying the word of God, minimizing mistakes, implementing researched based practical strategies, and a commitment to see God's kingdom come, will produce a methodology for guaranteed success in kingdom endeavors.

The church planting foundation derives from a clear vision of evangelism to expand God's kingdom and reach people outside of the church. Embarking on this campaign is

¹¹⁰ Roberts Jr., *The Multiplying Church*, 147.

¹¹¹ Voth, "Why Plant New Congregations?" 9.

¹¹² Chipao, *Church Planting and Discipleship*, 16.

challenging and requires great commitment, resources and faith. Twenty years ago, church planting was primarily a solo endeavor. Church planters usually began solely with the support of the planter's family and was perceived by local pastors as a deranged interloper incapable of getting a real ministry position in other churches.¹¹³ This view reflects a very limited and flawed perspective. It does not consider the role of the church or the prospect of God's sovereign plan in the process. Church planting is bigger than an individual as it is an initiative birth by God for the purpose of His mission.

The church is not the focus; the mission of God is the goal.¹¹⁴ Mission is the work of fulfilling the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. Mission is a God-centered enterprise that allows the church the privilege of being involved.¹¹⁵ Mission originates from God and according to Ott and Wilson (2004), a true church is the product and creation of the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁶ Ultimately, church planters are an instrument that the Holy Spirit utilizes to fulfill God's purpose. Fulfilling this role typically begins with a calling. Matthew 22 accentuates God's calling by stating that "many are called." The calling of God is accompanied by a divine equipping to accomplish what God has called the person to do.¹¹⁷ The calling can be characterized by strong ambition for God and His people. This calling exemplifies a love and a

¹¹³ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 84.

¹¹⁴ Swanson and Williams, *To Transform a City*, 12.

¹¹⁵ Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 73.

¹¹⁶ Craig Ott and Gene Wilson. *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 10.

¹¹⁷ Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 163.

desire to see people reconciled to God and in relationship with Jesus Christ. It is this divine initiative that incites and motivates a church planter to initiate the work of the Lord.

God is still building His church.¹¹⁸ God builds His church as a light shining brightly in the darkness of the world.¹¹⁹ There is no guarantee that every church plant will prosper but there is a promise that the cause of Christ will prevail.¹²⁰ In Matthew 16, Jesus says, “I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Jesus is the true church planter and it is the Lord who adds new believers to the church (Acts 2:47) and opens the hearts of people to respond to the Word of God.¹²¹ Apart from the Lord, nothing spiritually fruitful will be accomplished. It is the Spirit that guides the church in all truth, convicts the world of sin, ripens the fields for harvest and entreats people to come to Christ.¹²² The church is God’s light shining brightly in the world.¹²³ He has promised to build it and it is He who causes increase.

Avoid Mistakes

The first key in planting churches that grow and flourish is avoiding mistakes. Starting new churches invites risk.¹²⁴ One of many great challenges in church planting is encountering unforeseen obstacles that arise and inhibit church growth. The church plant never goes

¹¹⁸ Jim Putman, Robert Coleman, and Bobby Harrington. *Disciple Shift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 159.

¹¹⁹ Bloye and Bloye, *It's Personal*, 13.

¹²⁰ Ott and Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 10.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²² Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 82-83.

¹²³ Bloye and Bloye, *It's Personal*, 13.

¹²⁴ Voth, “Why Plant New Congregations?” 9.

according to script.¹²⁵ Regardless of time invested in preparation, the process is still unpredictable and unforeseen variables arise that stagnate the progress and growth potential of the church. Growth challenges occur as a result of a vast array of factors but do not have result in the ultimate demise of the church.

Problem Recognition

Stetzer and Bird (2010) state plainly that obstacles can be overcome.¹²⁶ In the face of adversity, one must confront the facts and retain faith that victory will be achieved.¹²⁷ The key is to recognize and accept the fact that a problem exists. When progress stagnates, the church planter must exercise a willingness to allow the facts to speak. It's a mistake to continue to flounder in denial without responding to reality. Griffith and Easum (2008) suggest effective church planters recognize when things are not working and immediately decide to adapt.¹²⁸ When a church is not growing, one must admit something is wrong in order to discontinue a cycle of fruitless futility.¹²⁹ Recognizing problems for what they are is needed to facilitate change. The means to correct problems begins with identifying and addressing problems and augmenting strategy as necessary. Adaptation is essential. Improved results stem from adaptation, adjustment, and change. Swanson and Williams (2010) state that sometimes change does not come from doing things better but from doing things differently.¹³⁰ There will always

¹²⁵ Bloye and Bloye, *It's Personal*, 34.

¹²⁶ Stetzer and Bird. *Viral Churches*, 181.

¹²⁷ Jim Collins. *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc. 2001), 86.

¹²⁸ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 24.

¹²⁹ Arment, *Church in the Making*, 15.

¹³⁰ Swanson and Williams, *To Transform a City*, 68.

be room for growth and improvement. There is always more to be learned but sometimes unlearning prepares the path for progress.¹³¹

Learn from History

Many church planters are passionate and committed to the plant but unprepared and naïve regarding the grueling task of planting a growing flourishing church.¹³² Most church planters do not realize how much starting a new church entails until after they have done it.¹³³ The novelty of the experience leads to inevitable mistakes. Learning from mistakes in ministry is good but avoiding mistakes is better. Many mistakes can be avoided through the counsel, mentorship, and wisdom of more experienced pastors and planters.¹³⁴ Proverbs 20 states, “Plans are established by counsel; By wise counsel wage war.” Wisdom is exercised by learning from the knowledge and mistakes of predecessors who have gone through growing pains that time and experience teach. The value of learning from history is difficult to overstate.¹³⁵ There is wisdom to be gained from history. Lessons can be learned through the history of predecessors and the history of missions and church planting by observing methods God has previously blessed and some pitfalls to avoid.¹³⁶ The analysis of history facilitates progress and growth. It allows the astute

¹³¹ Reggie McNeal. *Kingdom Collaborators: Eight Signature Practices of Leaders Who Turn the World Upside Down*. (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 106.

¹³² Ott and Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 10.

¹³³ Chipao, *Church Planting and Discipleship*, 16.

¹³⁴ Robert J. Vajko. “Ten Mistakes Church Planters Can Make.” *Journal Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (January 2013): 111.

¹³⁵ Dickson, *Humilitas*, 18.

¹³⁶ Ott and Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 11.

church planter to be more successful by raising awareness of pitfalls and employing strategies that have produced results.

The Premature Launch

There is a plethora of blunders history has taught church planters to avoid. Church planting is a task replete with missteps and miscalculations, but a premature church launch is a critical mistake that is virtually impossible to overcome. A premature launch is an endeavor destined for disaster. A premature launch is a recurring theme in church plant debacle. Churches that launch prematurely consistently flounder because the new church lacks infrastructure and development to survive.¹³⁷ A premature launch may be characterized by a lack of resources. Limited finances and limited human resources (both ministry leaders and parishioners) will result in a lack of momentum. A lack of finances and human resources will result in a lack of momentum. A church launch devoid of momentum places a new church plant on a precarious path of ineffectiveness.

A church needs momentum to be effective. 88 percent of fast-growing church plants began with human resources including a church planting team in place prior to official public launch in contrast to only 12 percent of struggling church plants that had a church planting team in place.¹³⁸ A crowd is necessary to achieve momentum. Stetzer and Bird (2010) posit fast-growing churches start larger.¹³⁹ It is a firmly established fact that the more people collected prior to an official church launch the greater the probability the ministry will grow and thrive.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 38.

¹³⁸ Stephen Gray. *Planting Fast-Growing Churches*. (Stain Charles: ChurchSmart Resources, 2007), 102.

¹³⁹ Stetzer and Bird. *Viral Churches*, 112.

¹⁴⁰ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 37.

Griffin and Easum (2008) further explain that a crowd is needed to establish legitimacy in the eyes of the public, as churches that launch with a few people rarely grow beyond a handful of people in the future.¹⁴¹ Arment (2010) assert that there is nothing more destructive to a church plant than beginning a church with zero momentum.¹⁴² A crowd is necessary to achieve momentum. A lack of momentum will inhibit the growth and survival of a church.

The Unchurched

Church planting is not about transplanting Christians from one church to another.¹⁴³ Church planters must understand that certain subgroups of the population have no interest in attending a new church. Targeting the wrong people is an activity of futility. People who are currently affiliated with another ministry do not attend other services. It is a monumental mistake to invest time, energy, and resources catering to people that research proves will not come. People who are more prone to attend a new church service are the unchurched. The unchurched are individuals who have no church affiliation.¹⁴⁴ Most unchurched adults in the United States view churches with benign favorability or indifference.¹⁴⁵ Research shows that unchurched people are more receptive and interested in spiritual conversations and invitations to church than one might think.¹⁴⁶ Unchurched people who express some interest in attending a church service are the best candidates to target when marketing a new church plant. People who

¹⁴¹ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 39.

¹⁴² Arment, *Church in the Making*, 42.

¹⁴³ Trinity Jordan. *Jesus Never Said to Plant Churches: And 12 More Things They Never Told Me About Church Planting*. (Mansfield: Influence Resources, 2012), 22.

¹⁴⁴ “How to [Plant] a Church.” *Alberta Report*, 26, no. 25 (June 14, 1999): 32

¹⁴⁵ Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 22.

¹⁴⁶ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 15.

are currently affiliated with a church typically will not visit new churches. It is a huge mistake and waste of time attempting to reach that group.

Location

Location is a key variable that influences the potential vitality of a new church plant. The ideal places to plant churches are small prosperous cities or larger cities that have no evangelical church presence.¹⁴⁷ It is a mistake to fail to grasp the magnitude of location when church planting. The proper leadership and personnel can be positioned but the wrong location will usually result in church plant failure. Certain areas are poor places to plant churches. Areas where the people are exiting are poor locations to plant churches. Rural areas where everyone knows everyone and older areas with aging populations will not produce optimal results. Planting churches in the aforementioned areas usually result in a lack of support and interest from the community.

Starting new churches invites risk.¹⁴⁸ There are benefits to be gained from making mistakes in church planting. The most important benefit is to learn from the error as it provides learning experiences which are opportunities for growth. The key is to avoid previous mistakes from the past and ensure that past mistakes are not repeated in the future. This will enhance the chances of attaining better results for future efforts. Mistakes teach lessons but prudence is exercised learning from the mistakes of others. This allows the church planter to avoid critical mistakes and enhance the probability for better results. History has shown that it is a mistake to church plant prematurely with a lack of momentum or to target people currently affiliated with a church. History has also shown that planting a church in the wrong location will have a poor

¹⁴⁷ “How to [Plant] a Church.” Alberta Report, 26, no. 25 (June 14, 1999): 32

¹⁴⁸ Voth, “Why Plant New Congregations?” 9.

outcome. Church plants that make those mistakes are bound to struggle, seldom grow beyond the launch number, and have a risk to close. Avoiding these vital mistakes requires prudence to sustain ministry and thrive in the future.

Great Start

The second key in planting churches that excel is a great start. Churches that endure with lasting longevity get off to a great start. Enduring church plants that excel are never a product of incidental happenstance.¹⁴⁹ Optimal outcomes derive from a series of good decisions diligently executed one after another.¹⁵⁰ Hard work is fundamental. Nothing great transpires unless great effort is applied.¹⁵¹ Churches that blossom diligently exert effort and employ proven methodology that contributes to the ministries fortune. A plan of action is implemented. Commitment to the cause and great decisions lead to optimal results. Relentless work, cooperation, perseverance, and time contribute to manifest the preferred vision of a church plant.

Unique Identity

Effective church planting is a thoroughly planned process that is rooted in preparation. The goal of the church plant is not simply to start a ministry but see the church prosper and grow.¹⁵² The growth of a church is a byproduct of multiple factors. According to Stetzer and Bird (2010), certain variables enable plausible prediction of growth.¹⁵³ New church plants require a unique identity. Arment (2010) says a church plant must be so different because it

¹⁴⁹ Mark Mittelberg. *Becoming a Contagious Church: Increasing Your Church's Evangelistic Temperature*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 20.

¹⁵⁰ Collins, *Good to Great*, 69.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 220.

¹⁵² Malphurs, *Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, 20.

¹⁵³ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 112.

cannot afford to compete with other churches.¹⁵⁴ A unique identity is necessary to differentiate and distinguish itself from other local churches. The uniqueness and characteristics of the church will minimize competition as it will have an appeal to certain people and potentially draw people to the church.

Plant with A Team

Research demonstrates that the most effective church plants are initiated with a team. God has placed specific gifts in people in order to help in the church and to ensure that it functions more effectively.¹⁵⁵ One individual is ill-equipped to plant a church alone. Church planters that attempt to start a church alone are at a vast disadvantage. Church planters should connect their passion with others who possess the same passion.¹⁵⁶ God has endowed people in the church with gifts designed to work together in unity. In John 17, Jesus prays for the unity of believers to function and operate as one. No one person is gifted or anointed to sufficiently serve in every ministerial capacity. An individual that opts to build a church alone and assume all responsibilities will be overwhelmed and overworked. Church planters who alone remain usually have congregations that seldom grow beyond two dozen.¹⁵⁷ The church will lack in vital areas and as a result, the church will suffer.

Social Momentum

The most significant key is launching with social momentum. Church plants require social momentum to grow. Social momentum is needed to establish a sizable congregation that

¹⁵⁴ Arment, *Church in the Making*, 88.

¹⁵⁵ Putman, Coleman, and Harrington, *Disciple Shift*, 125.

¹⁵⁶ Dave Rogalsky. "Emerging Church Plants." *Canadian Mennonite* 12, no. 5 (March 2008): 16.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

ultimately leads to social validation by the sheer size of the core group.¹⁵⁸ Social momentum is about attracting and assembling people. From the very beginning, numbers matter. Numbers influence positive perception and help to establish the ministry as a viable church in the eyes of the public. To achieve momentum requires a crowd. Not surprisingly, fast-growing churches start larger.¹⁵⁹ A study revealed 75 percent of fast-growing churches began with over one hundred people in attendance during the inaugural church service.¹⁶⁰

Church planting is first and foremost about people and impacting their lives with the gospel of Jesus Christ. To accomplish this feat, a church plant must put people in the seats and then put more people in the seats.¹⁶¹ Reaching people involves impacting the community. A church for the community is more than a preaching church.¹⁶² A church for the community serves in a capacity beyond words but through demonstration to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is through word and deed that churches allow their lights to shine before people and God the Father in heaven is glorified.¹⁶³ The combination of word and deed facilitates church growth.

It is God's intent for the church plant to experience growth. God wants the church to grow because it expands His kingdom.¹⁶⁴ Growth ensues from preparation. The better prepared

¹⁵⁸ Arment, *Church in the Making*, 198.

¹⁵⁹ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 112.

¹⁶⁰ Gray, *Planting Fast-Growing Churches*, 102.

¹⁶¹ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 37.

¹⁶² Darrin Patrick and Matt Carter. *For the City*. (Zondervan, 2011), 14.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁶⁴ William Easum and Bil Cornelius. *Go BIG!: Lead Your Church to Explosive Growth*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 13.

a church planter is prior to church launch, the better the outcome to be expected. Arment (2010) states a church planters' success stems from everything that occurs before it is launched.¹⁶⁵ Most churches desire to grow. But to grow, the church must interact and connect with more people.¹⁶⁶ One of the greatest mistakes church planters encounter is failing to talk to enough people.¹⁶⁷ Building relationships prior to church launch prepares a foundation for growth. It is through these established relationships that a pool of potential visitors is created to possibly attend and join the church. Relationship building opens the door to meaningful conversations and opportunities to discuss faith and Christian community.¹⁶⁸ Without relationship, the public will have little to no interest in a new church. It is imperative for a church planter to build a multiplicity of relationships prior to church launch. The more relationships established prior to church launch, the greater the pool of potential visitors.

Church planting is both a spiritual and social movement. Undermining the social dynamic of growth will have deleterious consequence on the growth and growth potential of the church. Connections, relationships, and social networks are the primary means of growing a church. Healthy churches establish relationships, communal bonds that build social connections, and reach new people.¹⁶⁹ A major obstacle in church growth is planters simply do not talk to enough people.¹⁷⁰ Church planters must relentlessly communicate, connect, and build

¹⁶⁵ Arment, *Church in the Making*, 43.

¹⁶⁶ Don Corder. *Connect: How to Grow Your Church In 28-Days Guaranteed*. (Chicago: HigherLife Publishing, 2019), 69.

¹⁶⁷ Easum and Cornelius, *Go BIG*, 52.

¹⁶⁸ Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 30.

¹⁶⁹ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 9.

¹⁷⁰ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 52.

relationships.¹⁷¹ Relationship building and connection must become an ambition. It is an ongoing ambition that must continue through the duration of the church life. Establishing relationships provide the avenues for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Quite simply, growing a church requires meeting new people and inviting them to come.¹⁷²

Momentum in ministry is synonymous with the churches ability to draw a crowd. Church planting, ministry, and outreach is all about connecting with people.¹⁷³ The church planter must be able to reach people in order to teach them about Jesus Christ. As long as connections continue to be formed and people are extended invitations to attend the church, it will ideally experience growth. When this process of building relationships and extending invitations stop, momentum will cease. The church will begin to plateau in attendance and may eventually close. Arment (2010) suggest that sometimes struggling church plants are not spiritual casualties but are failed social movements that did not build enough relationships.¹⁷⁴ Sometimes, struggling churches need to shift their attention from the organization and concentrate on building relationships in a more organic way.¹⁷⁵

Leadership

The third key in planting churches that flourish and grow is leadership. The most important element in church planting is a dynamic leader that assumes the pastoral role.¹⁷⁶ The

¹⁷¹ Arment, *Church in the Making*, 26.

¹⁷² Corder, *Connect*, 72.

¹⁷³ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson. *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can, Too*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 100.

¹⁷⁴ Arment, *Church in the Making*, 47.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁷⁶ "How to [Plant] a Church." *Alberta Report*, 26, no. 25 (June 14, 1999): 32

peaks and valleys of ministry effectiveness typically coincide with the quality of the leader. Leadership has little correlation to popularity although it is fundamentally rooted in relationship. Leadership is about vision.¹⁷⁷ It is about progressing forward and unifying people to accomplish common goals. A quality leader must be adept at moving people forward and inspiring others to contribute their best toward the goals of the organization.¹⁷⁸ Trust in leadership forms the foundation for genuine church growth.¹⁷⁹ Leadership is more than a glamorous role of bright lights and attention. It is a role marked by difficulty and challenge. According to Anderson (2001), leadership has always been difficult.¹⁸⁰ When tough decisions are to be made, the leader is there to assume that role.¹⁸¹ When results fail to live up to expectations, the leader is there to accept the blame. There is great accountability and responsibility for individuals who occupy leadership roles. Christian leaders have always had to endure hardship and conflict. Christian leaders contend with spiritual attacks and conflicts that surface both internally in the church and externally outside the four walls of the church. Thousands of church leaders question why they ever accepted leadership responsibilities, and many quit as they conclude the job is too difficult and the reward is too few.¹⁸²

Despite the difficulties, church leadership is vitally important and is a significant variable that effects the health and vitality of the church. It is rated as a top factor for church growth by

¹⁷⁷ Collins, *Good to Great*, 21.

¹⁷⁸ Dickson, *Humilitas*, 33-34.

¹⁷⁹ Bontrager and Showalter, *It Can Happen Today*, 66.

¹⁸⁰ Anderson, *Leadership That Works*, 22.

¹⁸¹ Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 229.

¹⁸² Anderson, *Leadership That Works*, 30.

church leaders who have helped in church revitalization.¹⁸³ A common denominator for highly functioning effective churches is exemplary leadership.¹⁸⁴ Church planters must realize that a decision to grow as a church starts with the leadership. Kingdom leaders model leadership by example and strategize ways to incorporate others on the action.¹⁸⁵

New Leader Development

A simple approach to grow a new church is to focus on developing leaders. Effectiveness in church planting necessitates a commitment to developing leaders. Multiplying leaders is an indispensable component of church growth and vitality. When more leaders are developed, more places for the leaders to lead is the obvious result.¹⁸⁶ Leaders can be developed through a progressive process that begins by starting a small group, starting two or more small groups, and convening those groups as a worship center¹⁸⁷.

The effective church planter actively pursues strategies to develop and deploy leaders.¹⁸⁸ Statistics show that the survivability of a church increases by over 250 percent when leadership development is available to new members.¹⁸⁹ Potential leadership candidates should be recruited and encouraged to be trained and developed. This is an intentional process that directly corresponds to church growth. As leaders are developed, trained, and deployed, more leaders

¹⁸³ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 175.

¹⁸⁴ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 61.

¹⁸⁵ McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 67-68.

¹⁸⁶ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 63.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 71.

¹⁸⁹ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 108.

rise. According to Vadjko (2013), when individuals are developed for leadership, more leaders come to the foreground.¹⁹⁰

A church planter cannot adequately work and grow the ministry alone. Jesus called 12 disciples to help Him in ministry to grow the church universal. In Mark 6:7, Jesus calls the 12 and sends them out two by two. In Luke 10, Jesus appoints seventy others also and sends them out two by two. Church planters must learn to equip, release, and delegate leaders to operate in the work of the church.¹⁹¹ Developing leaders is paramount. Leadership development is a primary predictor of the potential for church growth. Roberts (2008) states a new church plant will only grow to the level and quality of developed active leaders in the church.¹⁹² The gifts and talents embedded in potential leaders must be cultivated and active if the church is to be established and grow. One of the most important spiritual gifts needed in the church is the gift of administration, to seek out, develop, and deploy potential leaders.¹⁹³

Churches may grow and flourish for a season but if leaders are not developed and deployed, the church will plateau and decline. The common underlying cause for the demise of once-great churches is a failure to raise up new leaders.¹⁹⁴ Leadership training is needed at every level of growth. It occurs step by step over the course of time.¹⁹⁵ Leaders do not grow into

¹⁹⁰ Vajko, "Ten Mistakes Church Planters Can Make," 109.

¹⁹¹ Jordan, *Jesus Never Said to Plant Churches*, 57.

¹⁹² Roberts Jr., *The Multiplying Church*, 148.

¹⁹³ Putman, Coleman, and Harrington, *Disciple Shift*, 125.

¹⁹⁴ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 59.

¹⁹⁵ Patrick and Carter, *For the City*, 75.

service but rather, they grow through service.¹⁹⁶ It is through service and activity that opportunity to develop and grow is experienced. This permits the enhancing of skills and initiates a learning curve that only time and experience provide. Developing leaders means providing genuine opportunities to function in roles of influence and authority. It also means mentoring, and guidance. A great obstacle to church growth is leadership. When leaders are not reproduced, the movement and momentum in the ministry will dissipate. According to Arment (2010), the more leaders that are equipped and empowered, the longer the movement will endure.¹⁹⁷

The Right People

People are an important element for ministry growth. However, people are not the most important component. Rather, it is having the right people as assets.¹⁹⁸ The right people need to be properly placed in positions to maximize ministry potential and growth. A great mistake to be avoided is placing people in position solely based on need. Griffith and Easum (2008) emphasize the exercising of caution when placing people in leadership.¹⁹⁹ It is better to do without certain staff members than to place a person in temporary position who will have to be let go in the future.²⁰⁰ It is disastrous to empower the wrong person in leadership. When a staff problem is evident, it hinders the growth and productivity of the church. The longer a misplaced person occupies a leadership role, the more potentially adverse the lasting effects. When it is

¹⁹⁶ McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 87.

¹⁹⁷ Arment, *Church in the Making*, 68.

¹⁹⁸ Collins, *Good to Great*, 13.

¹⁹⁹ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 103.

²⁰⁰ Easum and Cornelius, *Go BIG*, 99.

determined a staff member should be replaced, it is prudent to let them go.²⁰¹ If it is evident a change must be made, act immediately.²⁰² When possible, place the person in a more appropriate effective role for the individual. If not possible, lovingly terminate the person and move on. Delaying the inevitable hurts the mission of the church and the problem will only grow and become greater.

Leadership is at the core of any organization that excels. Church leadership can either inhibit or enhance the growth of a ministry. A church will not grow beyond the level of quality leaders that are trained and developed. Exemplary leaders are needed and must be developed for a church to grow. This involves having the right people in position but also removing individuals that are not good fits.

Evangelism

Vision Casting

The fourth key in planting churches that grow and flourish is evangelism. Church planting is vision. Vision foresees a preferred future. It provides the image for a desired future state. Without a vision, a church has no direction. The vision flows from the leader. To manifest a vision, other leaders and stakeholders must embrace the vision as their own.²⁰³ Prudent leaders diligently work to implement the vision. This means sharing the vision and constantly informing the church what the church is all about.²⁰⁴ The vision in church planting is the mission of God. God's mission is redemption of a lost world and to include human

²⁰¹ Ibid., 92.

²⁰² Collins, *Good to Great*, 56.

²⁰³ Anderson, *Leadership That Works*, 150.

²⁰⁴ Putman, Coleman, and Harrington, *Disciple Shift*, 127.

participation in that mission.²⁰⁵ Church planting is a means to participate in God's mission to reconcile all creation in Jesus Christ.²⁰⁶ Church planters must instill this vision in the church and regularly remind the church of God's mission in the world. The church plant must embrace God's mission if His will is to be accomplished and the church is to grow.

The church is the tool of God to accomplish His mission. Church growth fulfills God's mission helping people to establish relationship with Christ. The two basic purposes of the church are worship and witness.²⁰⁷ It is the witness that leads people to worship. Worship is fulfilled in church services as the gospel is proclaimed, the people of God fellowship with one another, and praise is offered to God. Witness is the response to the Great Commission. Witness is the mandate of the church to reach the lost. The church is essentially the bridge that connects unchurched people to find relationship with Christ.²⁰⁸ As the church fulfills its obligation to reach a lost world, the kingdom of God is expanded and church growth will ensue, and vision will manifest.

External Focus

Many churches have become overly internally focused and have lost their outward focus of reaching the lost.²⁰⁹ Churches fixating on caring for membership is the primary reason small churches do not grow.²¹⁰ The bible speaks with clarity on the role of the church to reaching

²⁰⁵ Scott Sunquist. *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013. 7.

²⁰⁶ Voth, "Why Plant New Congregations?" 9.

²⁰⁷ Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 281.

²⁰⁸ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 37.

²⁰⁹ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 176.

²¹⁰ Easum and Cornelius, *Go BIG*, 77.

people. In Matthew 28, Jesus instructs His disciples to go and teach all nations. It is the responsibility of the church to go and reach the lost.²¹¹ Believers have biblical command and instruction to evangelize. Evangelism is the communication of the gospel by the church to people out of relationship with Christ.²¹² Unfortunately, the church has lost its evangelistic fervor, which is a main reason the American church is in crisis.²¹³ Evangelism is the response of God to a lost world who apart from Christ are destined to spend eternity separate from God.²¹⁴

God calls all Christian believers to witnessing service and no Christian is exempt from the Great Commission.²¹⁵ However, statistics show that when asked if they had previously “heard of the Great Commission,” half of U.S churchgoers (51%) say they do not know this term.²¹⁶ Evangelism is crucial to effective ministry and sustaining the life of a church plant. Without external relationships with the public, the church plant will gradually decline. Church planters who do not have contact with the public have essentially a zero percent chance of surviving.²¹⁷ According to Griffith and Easum (2008), evangelism is not a phase but rather, it is the life of the church!²¹⁸ Roberts (2008) states that evangelism is the essence being of the

²¹¹ Patrick and Carter, *For the City*, 81.

²¹² Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 21.

²¹³ Malphurs, *Nuts and Bolts of Church Planting*, 21.

²¹⁴ Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 85.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

²¹⁶ Barna Group. “51% of Churchgoers Don’t Know of the Great Commission.” Research Releases in Faith & Community. Entry posted March 27, 2018. <https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission/>

²¹⁷ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 52.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

church.²¹⁹ Reid (2009) affirmatively declares that people are ready to respond to the gospel.²²⁰

A key to church planting effectiveness is to foster an external focus. The externally focused church strives to engage the community with the gospel and are doing good deeds.²²¹ As the church engages the community, unchurched people take notice and are more receptive to the message of Christ.

Outreach is the bridge of faith from the church that reaches unchurched people in the community.²²² Growing churches understand that the key to growth is outward focused outreach. Effective evangelistic churches creatively develop outreach strategy that motivates people to visit and then stay.²²³ The way to maintain a continual influx of visitors to the church is evangelistic outreach. Evangelism is not a choice. It is the life support and life sustaining tool, that draws guest to the church, and leads to church growth. The absence of evangelism will stagnate momentum. When there is no evangelism, an important stream for new visitors is absent. The church will gradually plateau and decline, and there is a strong probability it may wither and die.

Meeting Needs

Caring for the hurting opens the door of the hearts of the lost.²²⁴ Evangelism alone is not enough. Meaningful evangelism attracts the attention of the public. Churches that evangelize

²¹⁹ Roberts Jr., *The Multiplying Church*, 119.

²²⁰ Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 9.

²²¹ Swanson and Williams, *To Transform a City*, 196.

²²² Richardson, *You Found Me*, 14.

²²³ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 91.

²²⁴ Jim Putman. *Church is a Team Sport: A Championship Strategy for Doing Ministry Together*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 204.

the unchurched by meeting real needs make a positive difference in the world.²²⁵ Evangelism that attracts the attention of the public begins with meeting needs. Churches that lack heart for the community fail to grasp Jesus' intention for the church.²²⁶ The church must evangelize and help meet community needs. Evangelism that meets the needs of people and impacts the community will establish bonds and relationships that ultimately produce the best results. Effective church planters immerse the church in the community for the sake of the community. Churches that experience growth are externally focused churches that actively exist to meet community needs. It is through deeds that the message of the word of God is demonstrated and heard.

Kingdom oriented church planters must focus on the physical, economic, social, and spiritual needs of the community.²²⁷ The message and ministry of Jesus gained great notoriety through a combination of word and deed. People who observe or are recipients of unmerited acts of kindness take notice and are more open to hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ.²²⁸ Effectively, meeting community needs opens many new doors to witness to people about redemption through Christ.²²⁹ As needs are met, people are more receptive to hear the gospel message and respond to invitations to church.

²²⁵ Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, *Lost and Found*, 153.

²²⁶ McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 4.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Swanson and Williams, *To Transform a City*, 129-130.

²²⁹ Dave Donaldson and Wendell Vinson. *City Serve: Your Guide to Church-Based Compassion*. (Ashland: Gospel Publishing House, 2019), 32.

Evangelism will grow the church and concomitantly reach the lost. To thrive rather than simply survive requires a heart for people.²³⁰ Church growth occurs as love is modeled in action by the church.²³¹ Good deeds are a demonstration of love in action. Church planters must open their ears to the community, hear the community concerns, and attentively respond to meet that specific need. Bloye and Bloye (2012) suggests thriving in ministry comes from helping people by first listening and then going where there are needs.²³² The gospel message must connect with cares and concerns of people. It is the community that determines the actual work of the church to respond to deficiencies that must be addressed.²³³ Effective church planting mandates an attentive ear to the needs of the community to ensure that the church is operating in a fashion that is responsive to meeting those needs. Church growth and evangelism effectiveness is limited to addressing needs.

History has shown that many people will not come to the church or remain at the church if they have no specific need for the church.²³⁴ The incentive to attend and remain in many cases is directly linked to having certain needs met. Learning to love these individuals despite their motives is an effective means to reach certain people. Individuals who come to church with a genuine desire to see Christ usually remain and the church will grow. According to Richardson (2019), a key predictor in church growth is a churches willingness to bless the local

²³⁰ Bloye and Bloye, *It's Personal*, 147.

²³¹ Bontrager and Showalter, *It Can Happen Today*, 64.

²³² Bloye and Bloye, *It's Personal*, 147.

²³³ Roberts Jr., *The Multiplying Church*, 120.

²³⁴ Dyck, "Church Planting Strategies," 2.

community.²³⁵ Churches must immerse themselves in the community, listen to the needs of people, and respond in a manner to help and assist in those specific areas. Being for the community is rooted in seeking the welfare of the city and engaging to help alleviate public problems. Through this approach in ministry, influence spreads and the attention of people from all demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds is gained. As a result, churches grow and flourish. Churches that are genuinely for the community are better equipped to reach the unchurched because they are perceived as positive contributors by the public and are established as an essential pillar and asset in the community.

Cultural Context

Evangelism is most effective when it contextualized to service the specific needs of the community setting. Church planters must remain cognizant of their contextual setting and minister in a means that is appropriate and sensitive to people in the context in which the church is located. Churches that grow are aware of their contextualization and do not exist for themselves but operate to benefit the city in which they are placed.²³⁶ Every context is different. It is the mission field that dictates the method.²³⁷ It is imperative for church planters to connect expectations and strategy to the geographic location and social dynamics of where the church is placed.

Church planting is both a spiritual endeavor and social move.²³⁸ Social dynamics of church planting are equally important to spiritual concerns. Productive flourishing church

²³⁵ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 179.

²³⁶ Patrick and Carter, *For the City*, 82.

²³⁷ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 24.

²³⁸ Arment, *Church in the Making*, 42.

planters must creatively develop the church in a manner that accomplishes bible-based purposes in a culturally appropriate manner.²³⁹ Ignoring social and cultural dynamics is a recipe for disaster. One sure way to doom a new church plant to ineffectiveness and failure is to ignore the idiosyncrasies of the mission field.²⁴⁰ The more in attune the church planter is with community and it's needs, the better equipped the church is to grow. The more the church planter understands about the community the better the church will be at providing services the community needs most.²⁴¹ Sociological variables play decisive roles in evangelism, church growth and expansion, and community influence and impact.

Collaboration

Partnership is essential. Churches working together in collaboration are strategically enabled to reach the community for the cause of Christ.²⁴² Church planting endeavors devoid of networking and collaboration promote independence at the expense of interdependence.²⁴³ Cooperation is the only means to advance kingdom agenda and ensure that the numbers of believers in a city continue grow. Through partnerships and collaborative efforts, churches actively seek to facilitate positive community change. Kingdom impact is achieved by means of both spreading and demonstrating the gospel. Churches that immerse themselves in the

²³⁹ Ott and Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 4.

²⁴⁰ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 27.

²⁴¹ Donaldson and Vinson, *City Serve*, 88.

²⁴² Neil Powell and John James. *Together for the City: How Collaborative Church Planting Leads to Citywide Movements*. (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 7.

²⁴³ Vajko, "Ten Mistakes Church Planters Can Make," 111.

community by partnering and collaborating with other organizations better serve the community and meet the needs of the city.

Ministry collaboration and networking influences perception and leaves lasting impact among the unchurched. Churches that demonstrate care for the community are perceived as being positive contributing entities in the community as they strive to partner and collaborate with other organizations to address city problems. Through partnerships and collaboration efforts, churches are better equipped to reach the community, as they exhibit efforts for change and transformation that is in the best interest of the community.

There are a host of advantages that result from partnerships in church planting.²⁴⁴ Stetzer and Bird (2010) state that amazing things transpire as God's people unite and work together to achieve a dream that cannot be accomplished alone.²⁴⁵ Partnership emphasizes unity. As co-laborers, we accomplish more.²⁴⁶ Through unity and cooperation, effectiveness is maximized, and God is glorified. More can be accomplished working together than by working alone.

Invitations

Family and Friend Invites

The fifth key to plant churches that flourish is a commitment to invite people by the collective membership body of the church. Personal invitation produces the greatest harvest for church growth.²⁴⁷ Invitations from friends is rated the number one method to establish

²⁴⁴ Ott and Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 17.

²⁴⁵ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 77.

²⁴⁶ Swanson and Williams, *To Transform a City*, 23.

²⁴⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 99.

connections with the unchurched.²⁴⁸ People typically respond favorably to invitations from friends. They are more apt to attend church if invited by a friend.²⁴⁹ Word of mouth from friends or family is an invaluable asset readily available to a church seeking growth. No amount of advertising will move masses to come.²⁵⁰ Word of mouth is an inexpensive tool that yields positive outcomes when coming from a trusted source. Friendship and family entail relationships of trust. Statistics show that unchurched people are willing to accommodate the invitation to church from a friend or family member. Between seventy and seventy-five percent of unchurched people affirm that invitation from a friend or family member would be effective.²⁵¹ The biggest influx of visitors to church are from friends who invite friends that invite friends.²⁵² Barna and Kinaman (2014) found one out of every five unchurched adults would be more inclined to come to a church if invited by a trusted friend.²⁵³ Rainer (1999) discovered that 80 percent of church visitors rank invitation from friend, family member, or coworker as the most common motivation for visiting a church.²⁵⁴

Collective Involvement

Church planting is all about church growth. To achieve church growth, everyone must be involved. People are more likely to show up when invited. Everyone must constantly contact all

²⁴⁸ Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 27.

²⁴⁹ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 50.

²⁵⁰ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 38.

²⁵¹ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 64.

²⁵² Easum and Cornelius, *Go BIG*, 52.

²⁵³ Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 156-157.

²⁵⁴ Rainer, *High Expectations*, 91.

of their networks if the church plant is going to succeed.²⁵⁵ This must be a continual ongoing process. The way to reach people is through relationships and relational networks. Relational networks produce the greatest results when they are with people they trust.

Attraction Events

The most frequently utilized method in church for growth is attractions.²⁵⁶ Churches plan events to attract unchurched people. Attraction events are an excellent strategy to attract visitors especially if they appeal to the unchurched. When there are special events people in church have greater propensity to go and tell others.²⁵⁷ When people are enthusiastic about their church, invitations multiply, and the church grows.²⁵⁸ Events motivate church people to invite people to come. To grow a church requires encountering new people and extending invitations. The visitors must come, connect and be inspired to return. Reach events are one of the best means to fulfill those purposes.²⁵⁹ A church seeking growth should have continual events intended to invite or inform potential visitors.²⁶⁰ These attraction events should not be formal church services. The events should center on free activities that appeal to the people the church endeavors to reach. Events should be based on insight from the public to determine what might attract the attention of an unchurched person.²⁶¹ Public insight is important as even the best

²⁵⁵ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 52.

²⁵⁶ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 38.

²⁵⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 98.

²⁵⁸ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 196.

²⁵⁹ Corder, *Connect*, 72.

²⁶⁰ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 52.

²⁶¹ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 38.

church events are challenged because the public has plenty of unrelated church activities to consider. During the event, the church should garner the names and contact information of people in attendance. This will provide an opportunity for the church to quickly follow-up, thank visitors for attending, and extend invitations to the next worship service.

Visitor Retention

Get People in the Seats

The sixth key for church planters to grow the church is visitor retention. It cannot be underemphasized that church planting effectiveness is primarily centered on the churches ability to attract people to the church. Griffith and Easum (2008) state church planting is about getting people in the chairs. After that, it is about getting more people in the seats.²⁶² Shields (2008) state effective assimilation and retention of resident members is a top concern of any institution.²⁶³ Retaining visitors is the easiest way to experience church growth and as such visitor retention should be the main priority of every church.²⁶⁴ Attracting people and keeping those visitors is at the core of church planting. No visitors will translate into no growth and will result into the eventual demise of the church. The life of the church is directly connected to getting people to attend the church service. Because of this, a church plant must constantly work to maintain a continual stream of new people visiting the ministry. The greatest challenge is getting people in attendance of the service. Having visitors attend is one obstacle but getting them to remain as an integral part of the church is another.²⁶⁵

²⁶² Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 37.

²⁶³ James Brandon Shields, "An Assessment of Dropout Rates of Former Youth Ministry Participants in Conservative Southern Baptist Megachurches." (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 62.

²⁶⁴ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 38.

²⁶⁵ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 103.

Hospitality

The good news of the gospel of Christ is life-altering. Unfortunately, unchurched visitors come to church and never return. Often, churches fail to intentionally make guests feel comfortable.²⁶⁶ An unwelcoming environment virtually ensures that visitors will not come back. Churches that hope to experience growth must remove the obstacles that inhospitable church environments create. Guests assess the culture of hospitality in a service from the moment they arrive until the moment they leave.²⁶⁷ Hospitality or the lack thereof in a church can inhibit or enhance the probability for growth. A church that has any aspirations of growing must be extremely hospitable. Guests must feel welcomed and comfortable. Hospitality that demonstrates love must shape culture and be built into the structure of the church. This helps visitors to understand they are beloved of God.

Effective church planters employ a variety of methods to motivate people to return and remain at the church. Visitors must be convinced the church is affecting meaningful change. When visitors sense the ministry is making a difference, there is a heightened sense of eagerness to join.²⁶⁸ People inherently desire to connect to a church where it is evident the hand of God is at work. A church needs to get people to visit but must have the capacity to inspire the visitors to remain. Visitor retention is crucial. Visitor retention does not just happen but involves a system for retention and assimilation. Growing churches that flourish should seek to retain a minimum of 30 percent of the visitors. 30 percent retention rate is a realistic achievable number

²⁶⁶ Easum and Cornelius, *Go BIG*, 101.

²⁶⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 99.

²⁶⁸ Rainer, *High Expectations*, 92.

that if accomplished, will translate into a growing church. Retaining 30 percent or more of visitors can be tedious work that entails discovering who visitors are, following up with them, facilitating ways for people to find relationships in the church, and tracking the visitor's progression to full assimilation.²⁶⁹ The elements for a visitor retention system include assimilation, involvement, and interpersonal relationship parts. Easum and Cornelius (2006) states that retaining people requires a church to both advance the spiritual growth of the person and to facilitate the formation of significant relationships.²⁷⁰ Churches that do not intentionally employ methods for visitor retention will inevitably have low retention rates. A low retention rate is correlated to the absence of a visitor retention system. Conversely, the more efficient system the higher the retention rate.²⁷¹

Quick Follow Up

Efficient visitor retention systems include a visitor follow-up component. Systematic visitor follow-up is imperative. Every church needs to incorporate a system for follow-up. Follow-up needs to be expeditious. When a person visits the church, the probability for return is exponentially higher if they are contacted within thirty-six hours after their visit.²⁷² Easum and Cornelius (2006) assert that dying churches seldom make personal follow-up calls to visitors and yet every study demonstrates people are much more prone to return if they are contacted within the first forty-eight hours.²⁷³ Great follow-up is a distinguishing element that differentiates a

²⁶⁹ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 33.

²⁷⁰ Easum and Cornelius, *Go BIG*, 57.

²⁷¹ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 42.

²⁷² Rainer, *High Expectations*, 101.

²⁷³ Easum and Cornelius, *Go BIG*, 57.

church from other churches. Follow-up conveys to visitors that the church cares about the individual and the church is active and alive. According to Corder (2019), the absence of follow-up communicates to visitors that the church has nothing going on and nobody cares.²⁷⁴

Visitors that fill out guest cards implicitly give permission for follow-up. Follow-up should consist of a phone thanking the visitor for visiting and encouraging them to return and a letter extending a return invitation.²⁷⁵ When possible, the letter should connect the person to a small group in the church. Guest cards help to create a database for further communication with visitors for special events.

Facilitate Relationship Building

Relationship building is an ongoing process. When people are in the church it is necessary to continue building relationships.²⁷⁶ Relationships are vital to connect with people and to extend invitations to potential visitors, but it is an equally integral component of assimilation. Research shows visitors are more prone to return and assimilate to a church when relationships are established. Assimilation is an ongoing process and the church's ability to recognize the process will equip the church to more effectively integrate people into the life of the church.²⁷⁷ Growing churches seek to see visitors retained and become active members of the church. However, the greater goal is for visitors to become new converts in relationship with Christ. New Christian converts will not and cannot survive as isolated individuals.²⁷⁸ New

²⁷⁴ Corder, *Connect*, 87.

²⁷⁵ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 100.

²⁷⁶ Anderson, *Leadership That Works*, 103.

²⁷⁷ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 42.

²⁷⁸ Bontrager and Showalter, *It Can Happen Today*, 65.

Christian converts need relationship for support and growth. Relationship for believers is the means to learn from each other and mature into the Christian life.²⁷⁹ Because of this a good assimilation system must provide ample opportunity for new visitors to meet potential friends and associates.²⁸⁰ This is accomplished by creating settings where visitors, newcomers, and members meet and interact. New members class, Sunday school, and small group meetings are several ways to fulfill that role.

Active Involvement

Creating an effective assimilation system is key to help visitors' transition into active members.²⁸¹ Involvement is vital. It is one of the most critical aspects of the assimilation process. People are more likely to leave if they are not active in the ministry and more likely to remain when they are involved. Involvement produces greater investment in the church. When individuals are invested, they are more likely to remain even during times of conflict.²⁸²

Statistics indicate higher expectations produces greater levels of assimilation. Churches that mandate involvement and require new members class as criteria for membership have higher retention and assimilation rates. Arment (2010) states that churches that have no expectations are more prone to lose members to transfer or inactivity.²⁸³ Arment (2010) further explain that

²⁷⁹ Putman, Coleman, and Harrington, *Disciple Shift*, 140.

²⁸⁰ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 42.

²⁸¹ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 163.

²⁸² Rainer, *High Expectations*, 165.

²⁸³ Arment, *Church in the Making*, 111.

churches that express requirements from the beginning are much more effective than the communication of expectations later in tenure.²⁸⁴

Prayer

The seventh key to improve church planting results is prayer. In Matthew 6, Jesus tells His disciples to pray that God's kingdom would come and His will would be done in earth as it is in heaven. Church planting establishes the cause of heaven on the earth. It is undoubtedly a spiritual undertaking done primarily by spiritual means.²⁸⁵ The kingdom of God is an unveiling reality that is manifesting on earth as it is in heaven. Church planters and leaders pray the kingdom to come and God's will to be done. Discerning the will of God is accomplished by listening to the voice God and looking for the hand God.²⁸⁶ Church planting that produces the harvest desired must employ proven strategies. But there is no substitute for prayer and no substitute for great dependence on the working and guidance of God.²⁸⁷ Unfortunately, many church planters are inadequate prayer warriors.²⁸⁸ Inadequate prayer will hinder and prevent a church from reaching its full potential.

Spiritual Warfare

Church planting is not benign activity and spiritual resistance is inevitable.²⁸⁹ Church planting is a spiritual declaration of warfare. The forces and resources of hell will respond and

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ott and Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 8.

²⁸⁶ McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 28.

²⁸⁷ Ott and Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 10.

²⁸⁸ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 204.

²⁸⁹ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 16.

wage war. A church planter will face and must be prepared for spiritual warfare. The reality of the realm of the spiritual realm is as real as the mental realm and physical realm.²⁹⁰ The advancement of the cause of Christ will arouse spiritual opposition.²⁹¹ In 1 Peter 5, Jesus warns the disciples about their adversary the devil that goes about seeking whom may devour. It is imperative for the church planter to consider the reality and magnitude of spiritual opposition. Arment (2010) states plainly that this is spiritual war.²⁹² There are those who dismiss the reality of demonic activity and spiritual opposition. Yet, biblical evidence indicates the existence of territory oriented assigned demons.²⁹³ The bible is replete with examples of demonic encounters, persecution, opposition, and attacks as the New Testament apostles worked to expand the church. Satan and his kingdom are scriptural reality. Scripture illuminates the existence of Satan and shows his hatred and malice for those who stand for the cause of Christ.

The necessity of prayer is always mentioned as an effective church planting strategy by experienced church planters.²⁹⁴ Fervent intercessory prayer for the church planter is crucial. James 5 says the fervent prayer of the righteous avails much. The church planter needs prayer for covering, guidance, wisdom, and grace to lead. Prayer is needed for strategy and favor to successfully manifest the preferred vision. Prayer is at the core of ministry growth. It is a staple for productive thriving church planting ministry.²⁹⁵ Kingdom effective is always intimately

²⁹⁰ Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 231.

²⁹¹ Ott and Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 9.

²⁹² Arment, *Church in the Making*, 197.

²⁹³ Moreau, Corwin, and McGee, *Introducing World Missions*, 290.

²⁹⁴ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 194.

²⁹⁵ McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 28.

woven with a fabric of prayer. The bible declares the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous avails much. To witness God's kingdom to come and for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, Jesus instructed believers to pray.

There are seven keys that help churches to flourish and thrive. These seven keys are avoiding mistakes, a great start, leadership, evangelism, invitations, visitor retention, and prayer. Many churches are struggling, the unchurched population is growing, and the harvest is plentiful. There is great need to plant churches and to plant more churches to reap the harvest the bible promises to yield. Challenges and obstacles hinder growth and prevent church plants lasting with longevity. Yet the data shows that church plants that endure and stand the test of time excel by a byproduct of hard work and strategy. It doesn't just happen. For every flourishing new church, there is always a story to be told to elucidate and explain the elements that caused evident results. As church planters, the goal is much greater than survival. The plan is to grow and flourish as a ministry to the glory of God. Accomplishing this feat is not coincidental happenstance. There are empirically based strategies that help to facilitate growth. Applying the seven keys presented in this project will advance God's purposes and place the aspiring church planter on the path of success.

Chapter 3

Chapter three explores biblical perspectives and biblical principles for church planting. This chapter begins with the role and nature of biblical perspective regarding church planting. It then identifies and segments various biblical perspectives. Each biblical perspective subsumes scriptural passages to support the respective point of view. A synopsis of each biblical passage is given for clarity. Biblical principles are then presented. For each biblical principle corresponding biblical references are also presented and subsumed to substantiate the principle. The biblical passages for the principles are summarized. The purpose, role and application of biblical perspective and biblical principles in church planting is discussed.

Biblical Perspective

Church planting serves the kingdom purpose of reaching spiritually lost people. Advancing the kingdom of God is the basis for planting churches. As such, incorporating a biblical perspective of this process is required. A biblical perspective of church planting is paramount. The bible must be critically examined to locate key passages that identify biblical principles and perspectives for church planting. Bible analysis facilitates a better understanding of God's view of the church planting process and the provides the grounds for how church planting success should be understood. The Bible is the source of all truth especially truth regarding spiritual activity. Both Old Testament and New Testament biblical references are needed to determine a holistic view of the Bible's position on the church planting process. Church planting is the work of God and is inherently spiritual in nature. Scriptural passages to elucidate biblical principles and perspective are needed to provide insight and guide the church plant process.

The Heart of God

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16-18).

God loves humanity. His love for humanity is demonstrated by the sacrifice of His Son.

Through this sacrifice salvation is made available to anyone who trust and believe in the finished work of Christ. His motive is made evident as the bible clearly states Jesus did not come to condemn but to offer the means of salvation for the world. God’s love for humanity is illuminated as He extends life eternal through a simplified system of “belief.”

“When Jesus heard it, He said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Mark 2:17). Jesus came as a means of hope for sinners. His goal is for sinners to repent that they may have access to eternal life.

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Through Jesus Christ the gift of eternal salvation is freely made available. This is a free gift that God extends to mankind by His grace.

Call to Action

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26). Faith is discussed and a critical fact of effective faith is exposed. James 2 teaches that faith that is productive requires corresponding action. Faith alone is insufficient but must be combined with action if faith is to result in productive power. James 2 explains that faith without action is the equivalent of the body without the spirit. Dead! Action must accompany faith.

“And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16). A direct instruction is given to the followers of Christ. Jesus tells His followers to reach the world by spreading the gospel message. Jesus explains the benefits and the consequences of believing the gospel. According to Jesus, people who believe the message will reap the benefit of salvation but those who reject the message in unbelief face the consequence of eternal condemnation.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age Amen” (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus commands followers to reach the nations. He tells them to baptize and to teach the concepts that they have learned. Jesus demands a call to action but comforts His disciples by promising His followers that He will always be with them. As workers for the Lord, there is biblical assurance that God accompanies the laborer in the work.

Divine Perspective

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). Competition is eliminated in the kingdom of God. Collaboration and teamwork inherently operate for servants and workers of the Lord. Rolls are important but pride should be dismissed for the bible explicitly states that it is God who is ultimately responsible for producing results. However, each individual worker will be rewarded by God for their personal effort.

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). Solace is available to those who trust in God and operate in His purpose. The bible gives the believer assurance that circumstances are working together. Both peril and predicament work in collaboration for the believer’s behalf to produce an outcome of good.

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who wins souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30). Kingdom workers exercise wisdom when laboring in the work of the Lord. Wisdom is exemplified through the task of saving souls.

Numbers in Context

Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish (Matthew 18:10-4).

There is great value on the life of a single individual from the perspective of God.

God is willing to take extreme measures to ensure the safety, security, and eternal salvation of just one. Jesus came to save the lost and there is great joy expressed when one individual is saved. It is not the will of God that any should be eternally condemned.

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). Numbers are of minimal value from the perspective of God. A crowd is unnecessary to attract the attention and presence of God. God promises to provide His presence in the company of a few.

“To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul did whatever was

necessary for the sake of seeing some come to salvation in Christ. He was not rigid in his ministry approach. Paul was flexible and willing to adjust and adapt to be more effective with his ministry message. He understood that he could not reach everyone, but did what was needed to reach the few that he could.

Handling Rejection

“And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet” (Matthew 10:14). The gospel message must be received by listener. However, there are those who will reject the message. One should not take rejection personal but move on and continue in the work of the Lord.

“And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” (John 6:65-67). Swarms exited the ministry of Jesus in one day.

“He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me” (Luke 10:16). Rejection in the work of the Lord should never be taken personal. The individual is not the object of rejection. It is the gospel message that is being refused and ultimately a rejection of God.

“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:11-12). Jesus was rejected in His ministry. This did not deter Him from His assignment. Those who chose to receive are given grace to become the children of God. The minister cannot force receptivity of the message but must understand the obligation is to simply to present people with the truth.

“When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:5-6). The Apostle Paul was not deterred by opposition but utilized rejection to shift and focus his ministry on a larger gentile audience. Rejection in the kingdom can often lead to better unforeseen opportunities in the future.

“Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead” (Acts 14:19). The Apostle Paul was rejected, stoned, and left for dead by multitudes preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6). The Apostle Paul was rejected by the Jews. This did not stop Paul from ministry but motivated him to examine the facts, refocus his ministry target, and extend the gospel message and ministry to the gentiles.

And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. “Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. “And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. “But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.” When He had said these things He cried, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Luke 8:4-8).

The parable of the seed sower teaches that all sown seed does not result in harvest. Biblical perspective reveals that only a fraction will respond or produce fruit.

Biblical Seasons

“To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). There is a time and a season for every purpose. Season recognition enables the people of God to persevere. There is a time to labor and another time to corral benefits and rewards.

“The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow” (Deuteronomy 28:12). God promises to be gracious to those who obey. Obedience moves God to open the heavens and provide rain in season. It is in season that God releases rain that causes growth, fruit, and harvest.

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper” (Psalms 1:1-3). Fruit is produced in season. One who walks in obedience to God can rightfully expect to prosper and produce fruit in season.

God Builds the House

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). God is responsible for increase. God is the source that builds the church. Jesus states He will build the church and Hell will not prevail against His church.

“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Psalms 127:1). God builds the house. It is vanity to assume credit for results that only God can provide.

“For in this the saying is true: ‘One sows and another reaps.’ ‘I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors’ (John 4:37-38). God controls increase and it is He who produces results.

“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32). Jesus is the focus. He is the source that causes ministry to produce. When he is exalted, He promises to draw people to himself.

Heavens Recognition

For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them and made another five talents. And likewise, he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground and hid his lord’s money. After a long time, the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So, he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, ‘Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord (Matthew 25:14-21).

The work of the Lord is assigned by God and it is evident that each assignment is given according to personal ability. God is responsible for disseminating assignments. It is He who sovereignly knows what an individual can handle. The work of the Lord is a stewardship that is rooted in trust and faithfulness. Through the stewardship and productivity of what God has given one is able to exercise faithfulness which communicates to God one is qualified and

prepared for more. God recognizes the faithfulness in small things and through commitment and the demonstration of faithfulness God distributes, rewards, and entrust one with more.

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). Labor for the Lord is not in vain. The bible affirms a return on investment.

Biblical Principles

The principles of church planting should begin with God’s word. The Bible is the source of all truth. It unveils God’s purpose and details the proper method to fulfill His will. Church planting is the work of God and as such is inherently spiritual in nature. Biblical principles must govern and guide the church plant process. 2 Corinthians 13 states that it is by the mouth of two or three witnesses all facts are to be established. For each biblical presented two or more supporting biblical references are listed. There are myriad principles that apply to church planting but only five biblical principles are discussed.

Reach the Lost

The first biblical principle is to “Reach the Lost.” Luke 19:10 says “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Jesus came with a purpose. The mission of Jesus is to reach and save the lost. Romans 15:20 says “And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation.” The spiritual objective in ministry is to seek and win individuals that have no relationship with Christ. It is counterproductive and a mammoth ministry mistake to target those already connected to other ministries and currently in fellowship with God.

Speak Life

The second biblical principle is to “Speak Life.” Mark 11:23 says, “For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.” Despite the appearance of temporal conditions, one must constantly remain positive and optimistic speaking words of life. The words that are spoken translate into the reality that is seen. Proverbs 18:21 says, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” The power to change circumstance resides in the words that one speaks. As the children of God created in His image God has given mankind the authority and ability to declare and decree and according to His word it will be established.

Persist with Perseverance

The third biblical principle is to “Persist with Perseverance.” 2 Corinthians 5:7 states, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” Believers must trust in God and persevere despite the way circumstances appear. Galatians 6:9 says, “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” Perseverance is the key to garnering divine reward.

Engage in Spiritual Warfare

The fourth biblical principle is “Engage in Spiritual Warfare.” Ephesians 6:12 states, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” The battle is spiritual. Demonic entities function to fight and consistently contend with the people of God. God’s people must remain cognizant of the reality of spiritual warfare and wage war in the proper domain of prayer. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 declares, “For the weapons of

our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” Spiritual warfare is the reality of the believer’s existence. God has furnished His children with the tools to engage in battle and win the war. Romans 8:31 says, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” There is no need to fear for God contends on His children’s behalf. Equipped with the presence of His person, the guidance of the Spirit, and the promises in His word victory is inevitable.

Remain Consistent

The fifth biblical principle is to “Remain Consistent.” Luke 18:1-8 states

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now There was a widow in that city; and she came to him, say ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ “And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, ‘yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.’” Then the Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said. “And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to him, though he bears long with them? “I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the Earth?”

The parable of the unjust judge gives an illustration of a judge who lacks compassion that is repeatedly approached by a widow woman seeking justice. Because of her consistency the judge grants the widow woman’s request. Jesus uses this example to urge his followers to remain consistent in prayer. He says those who consistently cry out to God day and night will be answered by the Lord. Consistency is a pivotal principle to be employed to reach a place of breakthrough. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, “Pray without ceasing Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Christian believers must remain at a place of continual prayer expressing constant gratitude and

praise especially in the face of dire circumstance. The biblical author emphasizes “without ceasing.” Consistency is the manifesting impetus that produces results.

Conclusion

Biblical perspective and principles are not necessarily an enumerated list of items to implement but more a mental approach that helps to govern the mind when church planting. There are biblical principles and perspectives that help to foster mental stability. Many new church plants meander and struggle in perceived futility. Because of this a great mental battle develops when church planters wrestle with perceived failure in the church planting process. Application of these principles and perspectives, when combined with the 7 strategies presented in the project, help church planters to win the mental battle and defeat discouragement. With mental stability that derives from biblical perspective and principles one is better equipped to embrace the challenge of working for the Lord.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 gives the evaluation of the church surveys. This chapter begins with the purpose of the church survey and details the criteria for participation. In this chapter, the percentages and proportions of answers given to questions are provided. Significant key findings of the human research findings are presented.

Evaluation of Surveys

A church survey was utilized to collect qualitative research to assess both church clergy and church laity perceptions regarding church planting statistics. This research method involved a voluntary online questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to anonymous clergy and laity members to survey how current church planting statistics are perceived and interpreted by current church affiliates. The questionnaire provided valid church planting statistics regarding the percentage of church plants that survive beyond a four-year window. A total of 18 questions were asked. There were three questions to determine research participation eligibility, 13 open ended questions and two closed questions in reference to these statistical figures. The survey was made available to adult church clergy and church laity members who were willing to voluntarily participate. Many questions allowed the respondent to provide multiple answers for questions. A total of 25 individuals participated.

The online survey results included a total of 25 anonymous clergy and laity church affiliates that were over the age of 18. Of the 25 participants, 52 percent of the participants identified themselves as church laity and the remaining 48 percent identified as church clergy. The anonymous church survey began by presenting a statistical finding by Stetzer and Connor

(2007) that states 32 percent of churches fail to exist four years after being started.²⁹⁶ This number equates to approximately one in three churches closing by their four-year anniversary.

The first question of the survey asked participants asked how they interpreted the statistical figure of Stetzer and Connor (2007). All 25 participants responded. 32 percent of respondents explicitly expressed a negative view of the figure and considered this a high closure rate. 32 percent of participators simply offered various reasons why churches close prematurely. 8 percent of participators were surprised by the statistic. 20 percent surveyed agreed that the stat was accurate. Only one out of 25 participants stated that the current closure rate is not bad.

24 out of 25 surveyed offered an opinion on what could be done to improve church planting statistics. There was no consensus among respondents. A wide variety of answers were provided regarding strategies to improve church planting figures. 20 percent of those surveyed believed that collaboration and unity among churches is needed to ensure more churches survive. 12 percent of participants cited outreach as being a significant key. Eight percent of those surveyed suggested better planning is needed. Another eight percent of the survey participants stated teamwork is necessary with an additional eight percent of stating that teaching will improve church planting statistics.

When asked why a church flourishes 100 percent of those surveyed gave an opinion. 28 percent of participators included community involvement and outreach as a main reason why churches flourish. 24 percent of those surveyed considered leadership as being a primary factor. 16 percent of surveyed participators stated love is a key and 16 percent cited teaching as being an essential key that causes a church to thrive. 12 percent of those surveyed identified relationships as being significant variables. 12 percent labeled teamwork and support as being essential and

²⁹⁶ Stetzer and Connor, "Church Plant and Survivability Study," 13.

12 percent considered finances as necessary components that contribute to a churches ability to flourish. Eight percent valued the building of people and another 8 percent suggested entertainment as being key variables.

The survey asked participators to provide 10 reasons why churches are successful. Only 22 of 26 volunteers gave reasons why churches experience success. 64 percent of those surveyed listed leadership and 59 percent included teaching as being crucial items that causes a church to be successful. 41 percent of those surveyed stated that members contribute to success. The survey results showed that 36 percent of respondents consider outreach as important, 36 percent valued finances, and another 36 percent deemed teamwork support as key aspects of church success. Both love and God were identified by 32 percent of those surveyed as fundamental cornerstones. The survey revealed 23 percent of those surveyed believed the ministries offered at a church help the church to be successful. 18 percent of participants expressed meeting needs as an essential element. 14 percent of respondents considered music, relationships, communication, and location as vital components that help a church to be successful. Two out of 22 respondents or nine percent said prayer was a key to success. Only one person noted vision as a foundational piece to church success.

The survey posed the questions, “Why are so many churches closing?” 25 out 25 participators gave answers to this question. A plethora of answers were given. There was very little to no uniformity in answers provided. Four out of 25 people (16 percent) stated poor leadership is the reason churches close. Three out of 25 (12 percent) said the church asked for too much money and another 12 percent stated churches close for a lack of outreach. Eight percent (2 out of 25) of participators believe churches close because there is no call of God on the leader and another eight percent proposed that there is no support for the church. The data

showed that there is a vast array of opinions regarding reasons why people believe churches close. A total of 23 of other answers were provided but none of the remaining answers were shared by more than one person.

Respondents were asked to provide 10 reasons churches are not successful. 63 percent of those surveyed selected poor leadership as a main reason churches are not successful. The survey results showed that 33 percent of participators believe poor teaching results in a churches demise. 25 percent mentioned the lack of finances as a reason churches have no success. 17 percent of the surveyed group suggest a lack of accountability can be problematic. Another 17 percent view the lack programs as being an issue. 17 percent attribute the lack of love and a final 17 percent believe churches are not successful because the leader has no call of God on their life. Poor praise and worship were deemed a ministry detriment by 13 percent 13 of the group. Another 13 percent think a money driven emphasis causes a church to be unsuccessful. A final 13 percent cite poor communication as a variable that hinders a church's success. One person named the lack of prayer as an influential factor.

80 percent of the 25 respondents felt the church was successful. When asked how the respondent defined success the majority of participators gave different definitions for the term. Six out of 25 (24 percent) of responders equated success with the winning and saving of souls. The survey results indicate 20 percent of participators view the proclamation and teaching of the word of God as success. 12 percent of those surveyed stated community service as being success and another 12 percent considered the fulfillment of God's purpose as the definition of success. One person out of 25 mentioned a biblical reference to support their definition. Many other definitions were offered but no remaining definitions shared the same sentiment.

Although 80 percent of the 25 respondents felt the church is successful 84 percent still believe the church needs to do something differently. In answering this question most responses differed and there is little to no consistency amid replies of respondents. According to the survey results, 7 out of 25 (28 percent) responders referenced outreach must be a prioritized item in a church. Another 12 percent of participators emphasized the correct teaching of the Bible. Eight percent of responders suggested that there must be a concentration on following the lead of God. No other remaining response was shared by more than one person. Only one participator recommended assessing for inhibiting factors and making adjustments accordingly.

The survey presented the question, “What causes a person to visit a church?” All survey participants offered reasons to the answer of the aforementioned question. 24 percent of responders claim invitations motivate people to visit churches and another 24 percent cited needs or assistance as being influential. 16 percent of the group feel word of mouth publicity is significant and another 12 percent of those surveyed said referrals cause people to attend. According to the survey, 16 percent believe people visit churches when seeking spiritual growth or change. Another 16 percent deem curiosity as an influential factor and 16 percent of participants connect church visits to proximity and location of the church. The survey results show 12 percent believe people visit churches when seeking a church home and eight percent assume visits are a result of people seeking answers.

When answering the question, “Why does a person join a church?” many responses centered on the Word or the people. 32 percent of those surveyed said the teaching of the Word makes a person join a church. 36 percent proposed the feeling of expressed love and acceptance by the people as being the reason for joining. 20 percent stated the people as a church family causes a person to join a church and 12 percent of respondents declared people join churches

because they feel they belong. Only 8 percent concluded that people join because of purpose. 8 percent viewed the presence of God as being significant with another 8 percent asserting people join the church simply because of the experience of the worship service.

When asked, “Why do people remain members at a church?” all 25 participants replied. Based on the data, 24 percent of people surveyed credited spiritual growth as the reason for remaining a member. 12 percent stated biblical teaching and another 12 percent referenced the love expressed by the people as the reason from staying. Family connections as well as feeling valued was viewed by 12 percent of the respondents as the influence that causes people to retain church membership. The data revealed that 12 percent believe the ability to serve in the ministry is the rationale people exercise to stay. 8 percent of the participants said purpose, loyalty, and the influence of the Holy Spirit cause people to remain at the church. Many answers were provided. No response was selected by more than 24 percent of the entire collection of survey participants.

Only 24 of 25 respondents replied to the question, “Why do people withdraw membership from a church?” The data revealed leadership as being the most popular response. 24 percent of those surveyed believe leadership causes people to leave a ministry. 21 percent referred to the teaching of the church and another 21 percent listed church hurt as the main reasons people leave. Misunderstanding as well as offense were selected by 16 percent of those surveyed. 13 percent of participants cited a lack of growth and another 13 percent thought people leave a church because of the people in the church. Eight percent named moving and another 8 percent stated unfulfillment as causes for people leaving a church. Eight percent of those surveyed thought people leave when they do not feel included or feel they are not a good fit they leave the church. Church hurt, confusion, misunderstandings, offense, people, conflict,

and gossip can all be subsumed as offense. As a separate inclusive category, offense was listed by 58 percent of the surveyed group as a reason people withdraw church membership.

The final question of the survey asked the question, “Why do people leave the body of Christ?” A majority of those surveyed gave responses that differed from the replies of other participators. 24 percent of participators stated people leave the body of Christ because they never were in relationship with God. The data showed that 20 percent of respondents believe hypocrisy in the church is the reason people leave Christianity. 12 percent of the group answered the fall of leadership, 8 percent referenced church hurt, and a final group of eight percent thought backsliding was the culprit that lead to people leaving the body of Christ.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 summarizes all the major points of the project. This chapter begins with a discussion of the church survey results in relation to the literature. The summary of results regarding the four project hypotheses is given. Implications of the results for practice are reported. Recommendations for further research are detailed. The chapter and Thesis Project conclude with the benefits of implementing practical research-based strategies and employing biblical perspective and biblical principles when church planting.

Discussion of Results in Relation to the Literature

The data demonstrates that there is little consensus among church laity and church clergy regarding factors that contribute to the growth or demise of a church. According to the data, there is varying views of Stetzer and Connor (2007) statistical finding that states 32 percent of churches fail to exist four years after being started.²⁹⁷ However, only one out of 25 people had a favorable perception of that statistical figure. 8 out of 25 (32 percent) respondents explicitly described the statistic as being negative. A distinct group of 32 percent neither described the statistic as being essentially negative or positive. This group simply stated the reasons churches close. It is informative that 100 percent of this group's responses revolved around issues of what the church is doing wrong. There was a negative overtone in these replies.

A predominant theme discovered through the data collection process was that many clergy and church laity attribute ministry productivity and ministry demise to the quality of leadership, people in the church, teaching of the bible, and extended invitations to people to come to church. Some overlap was noted among survey answers, but many answers and opinions varied greatly throughout the survey findings. An interesting finding in the data was

²⁹⁷ Stetzer and Connor, "Church Plant and Survivability Study," 13.

that 64 percent of those surveyed listed good leadership as the reason for the success of a church. 63 percent of those surveyed believed poor leadership caused the downfall of a church. 59 percent of respondents linked the teaching of the church to the progress of the church. The teaching ministry is directly linked to church leadership. Which means the vast majority of responders esteem the content being taught and the person delivering the message as a decisive component to ministry growth. A variety of practical reasons were stated, and some answers paralleled the empirically based research findings presented in this project. None of the responders attributed church vitality to the will, activity, or influence of God. There is more to church growth and vitality than simply the will of God. The biblical perspective does indicate that the Lord is actively involved, and He brings the increase. The bible states emphatically in Psalm 127 that unless the Lord builds the house, the labor conducted is in vain. Church planting has practical elements and spiritual dynamics. Church plants that flourish must consist of a combination of spiritual and practical factors.

80 percent of responders stated the church is successful. However, when defining success, less than half (44 percent) of the respondents defined success based on fulfilling divine purpose or souls being saved. Biblical perspective is grounded in God's purpose and reaching the lost. 16 out of 25 (64 percent) defined success according to kingdom advancement criteria. Kingdom advancement would include fruit, growth, the preaching of the Word, meeting community needs, and impacting the lives of people. While these views may not reflect the biblical sentiment for success, fruit and growth (spiritual and numerical) are certainly a byproduct of biblical productivity. Six out of the 25 respondents' definition of success was devoid of any connotations to divine purpose. Success by this segment of the group was defined

according to happiness, striving, making a difference, peace of mind, leadership, praise and worship, and inner wellbeing.

When asked why churches close a preponderance of responses reflected research sentiment. 88 percent (22 out of 25) participants gave answers that echoed bible perspective or the literature research findings. Leadership was once again a predominant theme in the answers. Poor leadership along with a lack of commitment and support, misguided biblical teaching, and the absence of community outreach were the main reasons participants blamed for premature church closure. Four outlier responses were proposed. Outlier responses included everyone seeking to be in charge, no feelings of instant deliverance, a lack of respect for the church, and no accountability. The biblical perspective is that God gives assignment according to ability. Stewardship, which is tantamount to leadership, determines the potential for more or the loss of what was assigned. The research shows that teaching, community outreach, and participatory support are indispensable variables.

Both clergy and laity have a thorough grasp on what causes a person to visit a church. 52 percent of those surveyed decided people come to church because of word of mouth, invitation, or personal referral. The biblical perspective is very clear that people come to the church (body of Christ) because believers are sent to compel people to come. Other noteworthy answers were events, needs, curiosity, and location. The literature research suggest that events and needs are instrumental in attracting people to church.

A minimum of 33 potential responses to survey questions were possible. Most questions were open-ended which allowed exponential response possibilities and yet there was little consensus discovered among answers regarding the causes of church success or the lack thereof. Many opinions were offered. The survey results showed minimal emphasis on the spiritual

aspect of church dynamics. Prayer was mentioned but never shared as an answer by more than one individual for any particular question. Only one of 25 respondents used biblical reference to support their point of view. That respondent cited one biblical text to answer one solitary question. Over 99 percent of the survey results were totally devoid of scriptural references. It is not to imply that there was no biblical wisdom in any answers. But it is evident that the biblical lens was not the primary lens that clergy and laity responders used when answering church planting related questions.

Summary of the Results

This project began with four important hypotheses. The research findings clearly substantiate the hypothesis “Avoiding identified mistakes that minimize the potential of a church to both survive and thrive will enhance the vitality of the church plant” to be true. Dickson (2011) says the value of learning from history is difficult to overstate.²⁹⁸ McNeal (2018) state there is always more to be learned but sometimes unlearning prepares the path for progress.²⁹⁹ Vajko (2013) state many mistakes can be avoided through the counsel, mentorship, and wisdom of more experienced pastors and planters.³⁰⁰ Improved results are gained through the history of others who have learned from mistakes. The data shows the hypothesis “Implementing proven pragmatic strategies in the church plant effort will drastically improve the ministries chance to survive or thrive,” is also correct. Ott and Wilson (2011) affirm lessons can be learned from predecessors and the history of missions and church planting by observing methods God has

²⁹⁸ Dickson, *Humilitas*, 18.

²⁹⁹ McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 106.

³⁰⁰ Vajko, “Ten Mistakes Church Planters Can Make,” 111.

previously blessed and some and pitfalls to avoid.³⁰¹ Avoiding those pitfalls and implementing the strategies that have blessed greatly enhance a church plants ability to produce. It is debatable whether the results prove that the hypothesis “The bible is not the primary tool that many people use to implement church planting efforts” is correct. It is equally questionable that the results confirm the hypothesis “A significant percentage of church plants close within four years, but how this data is interpreted matters most.” The survey results indicate that laity and clergy tend to foster more practical views than biblically influenced perspectives. The survey results also find that the bible is not the primary lens utilized to assess church and church plant statistics. Whether this suggest that how the data is interpreted matters most is inconclusive.

Implications of the Results for Practice

It is clear that the church has been challenged greatly in America. Christians are commissioned to disciple the nations but the history of church planting in America exhibit many efforts to fulfill this commission toil in futility. Research regarding Christianity in America and the state of church growth shows that it is in decline.³⁰² Krejcir (2007) state more than 4000 churches close every year and 2.7 million church members fall into inactivity.³⁰³ A recent Gallup poll reports the percentage of American adults who are affiliated with a church or other religious organization has plummeted 20 percent over the past two decades.³⁰⁴ These are more

³⁰¹ Ott and Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 11.

³⁰² Roberts Jr., *The Multiplying Church*, 23.

³⁰³ Richard J. Krejcir. “Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline.” Churchleadership.org Entry posted 2007 <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42346>.

³⁰⁴ David Crary. “Poll: Church Membership in U.S Plummeted Over Past 20 Years.” AP News. Entry posted April, 18, 2019 <https://apnews.com/f15241378057486ea437cad490a2ed67>

than trends the reality is thousands of U.S churches close each year.³⁰⁵ According to Kwon (2010), growing churches only comprise 20 percent of all American churches and the remaining 80 percent have plateaued in attendance or are shrinking in membership.³⁰⁶ According to Peterson (2019) two-thirds of all churches in America have no growth in membership or are declining in membership.³⁰⁷

Further complicating the church closure issue are churches that are planted but have limited lasting vitality. Many church plants prematurely close and do not survive or thrive with any longevity. This is linked to the exodus of millions leaving the church. As millions exit, churches have no option but to close. Easum (2013) states many new church plants do not last beyond eighteen or remain so small they struggle to barely survive.³⁰⁸ Stetzer and Connor report 32 percent of churches fail to exist four years after being started.³⁰⁹ Stetzer and Bird (2010) affirm 32 percent of church plants will permanently close by the 4-year anniversary church launch.³¹⁰ Barrick (2007) agrees and says the latest research shows that 32 percent of roughly 4,000 churches planted yearly are not active beyond four years.³¹¹ The data decisively finds that one out of every three church plants are forced to prematurely permanently close their doors.

³⁰⁵ Jeffrey M. Jones. "U.S Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades." Entry posted April 18, 2019 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>

³⁰⁶ Kwon, Lillian. "Total Christian Churches No Longer in Decline Researchers Say." Christian Post, Entry posted May 13, 2010 <https://www.christianpost.com/news/total-us-churches-no-longer-in-decline-researchers-say.html>

³⁰⁷ Doug Peterson. "Get the Facts." <https://www.rotw.com/get-facts>

³⁰⁸ Bill Easum. "Church Plants, Why They Fail." The Effective Church Group, Entry posted May 31, 2013 <https://effectivechurch.com/church-plants-why-they-fail/>

³⁰⁹ Stetzer and Connor, "Church Plant and Survivability Study," 13.

³¹⁰ Stetzer and Bird, *Viral Churches*, 101.

³¹¹ Audrey Barrick. "Study Reveals State of U.S Church Planting." The Christian Post, Entry Posted November 15, 2007 <https://www.christianpost.com/news/study-reveals-state-of-u-s-church-planting.html>

The struggle of church planting is replete with hardships and hindering variables that make it difficult for church plants to survive and equally difficult to thrive. Challenges and obstacles impede growth and prevent church plants from lasting with longevity. The data shows that church plants that endure and stand the test of time excel by a byproduct of hard work and strategy. It does not just happen. Church growth is not a fortuitous product of chance and happenstance. For every flourishing new church, there is a story to be shared that elucidate and explain the elements that caused obvious results. As church planters, the goal is much greater than survival. The plan is to grow and flourish as a ministry to expand God's kingdom and to glorify.

The current culture and religious climate in America require assertive action by the church to remain relevant. Fortunately, there are practical strategies that reduce factors that cause church plants to close prematurely. According to Chipao (2017), there are some general principles that church planters have used with success.³¹² Methodology that yields encouraging outcomes begins with strategies that are best practices for church planting. These strategies are researched based methods that have proven to be productive. Methods that have a history of success are effective strategies that seasoned church planters have previously employed and achieved ideal results.

The research revealed seven keys that help churches to flourish and thrive. The seven keys are empirically based strategies that help to facilitate growth. Applying the seven identified keys will advance God's purposes and place the aspiring church planter on the path of success. The first key in planting churches that grow and flourish is avoiding mistakes. One of many great challenges in church planting is encountering unforeseen obstacles that arise and inhibit

³¹² Chipao, *Church Planting and Discipleship*, 16.

church growth. The data definitively confirms church plants that avoid mistakes have a much greater propensity to prosper and succeed. The second key in planting churches that excel is a good start. Churches that endure with lasting longevity get off to a good start. Thorough planning, preparation, cooperation, and plenty of people for presence and participatory support contribute to manifest the preferred vision of a church plant. The third key in planting churches that flourish and grow is leadership. The peaks and valleys of ministry effectiveness typically coincide with the quality of the leader. Leadership is about vision.³¹³ It is about progressing forward and unifying people to accomplish common goals. A quality leader must be adept at moving people forward and inspiring others to contribute their best toward the goals of the organization.³¹⁴ Trust in leadership forms the foundation for genuine church growth.³¹⁵ The fourth key strategy for church planting longevity is evangelism. The church is the bridge that connects unchurched people to relationship with Christ.³¹⁶ As the church fulfills its obligation to reach a lost world, the kingdom of God is expanded and church growth will ensue, and vision will manifest. The fifth key to plant churches that flourish is a commitment to invite people by the collective membership body of the church. Personal invitation produces the greatest harvest for church growth.³¹⁷ Invitations from friends is rated the number one method to establish connections with the unchurched.³¹⁸ People typically respond favorably to invitations from

³¹³ Collins, *Good to Great*, 21.

³¹⁴ Dickson, *Humilitas*, 33-34.

³¹⁵ Bontrager and Showalter, *It Can Happen Today*, 66.

³¹⁶ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 37.

³¹⁷ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 99.

³¹⁸ Barna and Kinnaman, *Churchless*, 27.

friends. They are more apt to attend church if invited by a friend.³¹⁹ Rainer (1999) discovered that 80 percent of church visitors rank invitation from friend, family member, or coworker as the most common motivation for visiting a church.³²⁰ The sixth key for church planters to grow the church is visitor retention. It cannot be underemphasized that church planting effectiveness is primarily centered on the churches ability to attract people to the church. Griffith and Easum (2008) state church planting is about getting people in the chairs. Retaining visitors is the easiest way to experience church growth and as such visitor retention should be the main priority of every church.³²¹ Attracting people and keeping those visitors is at the core of church planting. No visitors will translate into no growth and will result into the eventual demise of the church. The life of the church is directly connected to getting people to attend. The seventh key to improve church planting results is prayer. Church planting is undoubtedly a spiritual undertaking done primarily by spiritual means.³²² Discerning the will of God is accomplished by listening to the voice God and looking for the hand God.³²³ Inadequate prayer will hinder and prevent a church from reaching its full potential.

Recommendations for Further Research

The goal of this project is to provide a survey of strategies and biblical principles to help churches survive beyond the first three years in church planting. The research identified previous church planting mistakes, presented practical empirically established strategies,

³¹⁹ Griffith and Easum, *Ten Most Common Mistakes*, 50.

³²⁰ Rainer, *High Expectations*, 91.

³²¹ Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, 38.

³²² Ott and Wilson, *Global Church Planting*, 8.

³²³ McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 28.

illuminated biblical perspective and biblical principles for the church planting task, and surveyed church laity and church clergy perspective regarding the percentage of churches that fail to exist four years after opening. The project unveiled a methodology to help church plants stay open. Further research should be conducted to analyze why church plants close. The church closure rate statistic 1 in 3 churches will not survive beyond four years influenced the perception of church clergy and church laity. The same data as a church survival statistic suggest that 68 percent or 2 out of 3 new church plants are still active four years after church plant launch. Further research should be completed to determine if rephrasing the statistic will produce different church survey outcomes.

Conclusion

Church planting serves the kingdom purpose of reaching spiritually lost people. Advancing the kingdom of God is the basis for planting churches. As such, incorporating a biblical perspective and fostering biblical principles is required. Bible analysis facilitates a better understanding of God's view of the church planting process and the provides the grounds for how church planting success should be understood. The Bible is the source of all truth and His perspective from the contents of His word is needed to provide insight and guide the church plant process. Biblical perspective and principles are not necessarily an enumerated list of items to implement but more a mental approach that helps to govern the mind when church planting. There are biblical principles and perspectives that help to foster mental stability. Many new church plants meander and struggle in perceived futility. Because of this a great mental battle develops when church planters wrestle with perceived failure in the church planting process. Application of principles and understanding of biblical perspectives, when combined with the 7 strategies presented in this project, help church planters to win the mental battle and defeat

discouragement. With mental stability that derives from biblical perspective and principles one is better equipped to embrace the challenge of working for the Lord.

There is no full proof method that will ensure that a church plant grows and prospers in every setting or in every instance. However, the author is influenced by the notion that the word of God resoundingly declares it is impossible to fail when doing the work of God. Luke 15 says heaven celebrates when one lost soul repents. In Matthew 16 Jesus says He builds His church. The results of this project demonstrate and support the assertion that proven practical approaches, biblical principles, and proper perspective reduce failure factors in church planting. When doing the work of God failure is not an option and success is guaranteed.

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Appendix A
Church Survey

A name is not required to participate in this project. For data collection purposes participators need only to identify themselves as being church clergy or laity. After answering the question below proceed to the next page to complete the survey/Questionnaire.

Are you 18 years of age or older? (yes/no)

Are you church clergy? (yes/no)

Are you church laity? (yes/no)

Please proceed to the Questionnaire.

CHURCH SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Stetzer and Connor (2007) report 32 percent of churches fail to exist four years after being started. This equates to approximately 1 in 3 churches closing by their four-year anniversary.

- How do you interpret these numbers?
- What can be done to improve these statistics?
- Why are so many churches closing?
- Why do churches flourish?
- What are 10 reasons churches are successful?
- What are 10 reasons churches are not successful?
- Is the church successful? (Yes or No)
- How do you define success?

- Should the church be doing something differently? (Yes or No)
- What should the church be doing differently?
- What causes a person to visit a church?
- What causes a person to join a church (become a member)?
- Why do people remain members at a church?
- Why do people sever ties with a church (withdraw membership)?
- Why do people leave “The church” (the body of Christ)?

Appendix B

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 1, 2020

Damian Billups
Philip McFarland

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY19-20-44 Strategies and Biblical Principles to Keep Church Plants From Closing its Doors Within the First Three Years

Dear Damian Billups, Philip McFarland:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification

of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office